

709

LETTERS
CONCERNING THE
TRUE FOUNDATION
OF
VIRTUE
OR
MORAL GOODNESS,
WRITTEN IN A CORRESPONDENCE
BETWEEN
MR. GILBERT BURNET,
AND
MR. FRANCIS HUTCHESON.

GLASGOW:
PRINTED BY ROBERT AND ANDREW FOULIS,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY,
M.DCC.LXXII.



P R E F A C E

B Y

MR. GILBERT BURNET.

THE occasion of this small controversy was owing to a very ingenious book, entitled, "An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue."

In the Inquiry into Virtue, I apprehended that the beautiful structure the author had raised, wanted a sufficient foundation: and, though the conclusions were generally true and right in themselves, and were capable of demonstrative proof, yet he seemed to me to have left them unsupported.

As I was unwilling that so many excellent truths, and such a worthy conduct of life as the ingenious author recommends to us, should remain under the accusation of being but slightly grounded; I took the liberty to represent the defect of his reasoning, and the needfulness of a further and deeper search into the very bottom of virtue, in order to discover the true and solid foundation of it.

Such a firm foundation has been laid down by several very great men who have writ on this subject: in particular, by the learned bishop Cumberland, in his *Disquisitio Philosophica de Legibus Naturae*; after

him by the reverend Dr. Clarke, in the beginning of his Second Boyle's Lectures; and lately, by the excellent author of the Religion of Nature Delineated.

These are the principles maintained in the following papers, subscribed **PHILARETUS**. And they all amount to this one proposition, "That virtue, or moral goodness, is founded on truth."

As this debate is now closed, I make bold to offer it again, in one view, to the world; hoping that, with all its defects, it may not be wholly useless, nor unacceptable, to those persons who desire always to know, for what reason they ought to perform any action or office of life.

I thought it the fairest way to publish my own, and my correspondent's letters together, in the order in which they were writ, that the reader might have the opportunity of examining more easily, whether I have mistaken or misrepresented him, or not.

It is with no small comfort that I look back, and observe, that in this controversy the rules of candor and good manners have not been transgressed, through an impatient zeal for our respective sentiments: a conduct, which certainly nothing can excuse, either in writing or conversing on any subject; but much less, where the most important truths are concerned. For it is not the way to promote any truth; and, in the present case, would have been inconsistent with the truths we were both defending, tho' in different methods. And, sure, any one, who is capable of feeling

P R E F A C E.

the least ardor for the discovery of truth, must be much above the low pleasure of triumphing at the expense of it.

I should not have said this, if I had not thought it an acknowledgment due to my correspondent; and were not conscious to myself of endeavouring to keep close to the example he shew'd me.

I have added a postscript concerning the several meanings of the word Good; which I hope will not be thought superfluous; since it is pretty evident, that most of the mistakes, in moral science, are in a good measure owing to the unwary use of words; by which well-meaning men are often led insensibly, and undesignedly, to drop into their conclusions a sense which never subsisted in their premises.

I am apt to think, that the ingenious author of the Inquiry, &c. if he had thoroughly searched into the different acceptations of the words Good and Evil, and in what manner they were all derived from the primary and proper sense; would not have rested satisfied with the bare description of moral good and evil, by the effects the apprehension of them work in us, to excite internal pleasure or pain, or, which amounts to the same, love or aversion; nor have doubted whether we had really such ideas; and whether there was any general foundation in nature for the difference of actions, as morally good or evil, as he does, pages 100, 101.

His description will only hold as to relative good

and evil. It is very true, that what affords us pleasure is good, relatively to us ; and what brings us pain is evil to us. But still, what is good to us may be, notwithstanding its being relatively good to us, very evil in itself, as well as relatively evil to others : as, if one creature were to be made happy by means of the undeserved misery of all other creatures. Happiness, in that case, would be good relatively to that one creature, but would be relatively evil to all other creatures ; and, because undeserved, would be evil in itself. And the author of such a supposed constitution of things, as should render one creature happy at the expence of universal misery, could never be denominated good, in the proper sense ; tho' still he would be relatively good to that single creature.

In the divine mind the ideas of moral good and evil must be immutably fixed. If those words only mean what he approves and loves, or is averse to, and dislikes, they are useless and supernumerary words, and should not needlessly be introduced into philosophical discourse. If, when you affirm, that God is good, you only mean, that he approves and likes something, you know not why ; you seem to say some great thing of him, but in reality say nothing that implies any moral perfection. For ought we know, upon the supposition, that we know not why he approves any thing, he may approve to-morrow just the contrary of what he approves to-day. Will then moral good and evil, in that case, change places ; and, what is morally good to-day be-

morally evil to-morrow? To be sure it must, if moral good means only what he approves, and moral evil, what he disapproves. But, if this be too absurd to be maintained, it remains, that moral good and evil have an immutable foundation in the nature of things; as immutable as the truths of geometry have, which even the Divine Mind cannot be conceived to alter. It follows, that things are not morally good, because God approves them, nor morally evil, because he disapproves them: but he is immutably good himself, in the moral sense of the word; because he always, and unchangeably, approves what is in itself good, and disapproves what is in itself evil, and always acts conformably.

And, if the intelligence of men is capacious enough to attain the knowledge of the existence, the ground of the existence, the modes of it, and the attributes of the Supreme Being; how can it be conceived, that they should come short of the capacity of knowing the differences of things that come within their reach, and their relations to one another, and to their common author, and the immutable results of such differences and relations, once supposed to exist, which seem to lie much more within the sphere of their intelligence than those higher truths; especially, if we take into the consideration, how far men are advanced in the knowledge of the more abstruse and remote truths of geometry and arithmetic, and natural philosophy?

But I shall not pursue this subject farther at present. I am only here giving a sketch of those principles

of morality, which very able men before me have maintained; and which I should scarce have presumed to trace after them in public, if the present occasion had not called for it. How I have acquitted myself of my undertaking, I must leave to the judgment of my reader, if any one shall think it worth his while to peruse these papers.

LETTERS
CONCERNING THE
TRUE FOUNDATION
OF
VIRTUE,
OR
MORAL GOODNESS.
TO
BRITANNICUS.

SIR,

I THINK that no attempt to recommend virtue to the world, and especially to the highest part of it, upon whose example and influence so much of the virtue of the lower rank of men depends, when this attempt is prosecuted in an agreeable engaging manner, should pass without the regard and notice due to it. This makes me beg leave to mention to you, and (if you please) to the world, a new treatise, intituled, ‘ An Inquiry into the original of our ideas of Beauty and Virtue.’

The great view of the book is best expressed in the author's own words, Pref. p. x. where he tells us—

' His principal design is to shew, That human nature
' was not left quite indifferent in the affair of virtue, to
' form to itself observations concerning the advantage
' or disadvantage of actions, and accordingly to regu-
' late its conduct.'—After having observed from the
unavoidable circumstances of human nature, that ' Few
' of mankind could have formed those long deductions
' of reason, which may shew some actions to be in the
' whole advantageous to the agent, and their contrary
' pernicious ;' he adds, ' The Author of nature has
' much better furnished us for a virtuous conduct, than
' our moralists seem to imagine, by almost as quick and
' powerful instructions, as we have for the preservation
' of our bodies.—He has made virtue a lovely form,
' to excite our pursuit of it; and has given us strong
' affections to be the springs of each virtuous action.'
The writer would willingly raise in mankind ' a relish
' for a beauty in characters, in manners,' as well as in
other things. And this he concludes with a reflection,
which I own was what moved me to look into the
book, and to give you the present trouble. ' I doubt,
' (says he,) we have made philosophy, as well as reli-
' gion, by our foolish management of it, so austere
' and ungainly a form, that a gentleman cannot easily
' bring himself to like it; and those who are strangers
' to it, can scarcely bear our description of it: so much
' is it changed from what was once the delight of the

' finest gentlemen among the antients; and their re-
' creation, after the hurry of public affairs!' One
would hope, such a reproof of this, may not fall to the
ground without use; not only as it is levelled at some
writers of morals, but as it ends with a satire upon the
indolence and unconcern about a matter of the greatest
importance, too visible in that part of the world, who
have so much leisure that their time is a burthen to
them; and who yet waste so much of it in the pursuit
of the most unmanly relishes, that hardly a moment is
left for the supreme relish of human nature in its most
exalted state. If I could excite their curiosity, to enter
into such subjects; whether they found entire satisfa-
ction in the scheme of this author, or not; yet they would
find a noble entertainment for an inquisitive mind, mix-
ed with a very agreeable and uncommon delicacy of
thought; which must at length lead them to what will
be the ornament as well as happiness of their lives.

I shall only point out one part of the book, which
may give an idea of the whole; and that is, the sec-
ond section of the second treatise, page 119, Con-
cerning the immediate motive to virtuous actions. Here
the author's main and favourite notions may appear
from the following propositions. ' 1. Every action,
' which we apprehend as either morally good or evil,
' is always supposed to flow from some affection to
' ward rational agents; and whatever we call virtue,
' or vice, is either some such affection, or some action
' consequent upon it. Or it may perhaps be enough to

make an action, or omission, appear vicious, if it argues the want of such affection toward rational agents, as we expect in characters counted morally good.—

2. None of these affections which we call virtuous, do spring from self-love, or desire of private interest; since all virtue, is either some such affections, or actions consequent upon them; from whence it necessarily follows, That virtue is not pursued from the interest or self-love of the pursuer, or any motives of his own advantage." For the proof of this, he instances in the two affections, which are of most importance in morals, Love and Hatred. As to the love, call'd the love of complacence, or esteem; this, he says, appears at first view disinterested, and so its contrary; i. e. entirely excited by some moral qualities, good or evil, apprehended to be in the objects, &c.

As to the love of benevolence, [he goes on in a manner worth transcribing, page 122.] the very name excludes self interest. We never call that man benevolent, who is in fact useful to others, but at the same time only intends his own interest, without any desire of, or delight in, the good of others. If there be any benevolence at all, it must be disinterested; for the most useful action imaginable, loses all appearance of benevolence, as soon as we discern that it only flowed from self-love or interest. Thus, never were any human actions more advantageous, than the inventions of fire, and iron; but if these were casual, or if the inventor only intended his own in-

terest in them, there is nothing which can be called benevolent in them. Wherever then benevolence is supposed, there it is imagin'd disinterested, and design'd for the good of others. But it must be here observed, That as all men have self-love, as well as benevolence, these two principles may jointly excite a man to the same action; and then they are to be consider'd as two forces impelling the same body to motion; sometimes they conspire, sometimes are indifferent to each other, and sometimes are in some degree opposite. Thus, if a man have such strong benevolence, as would have produced an action without any views of self-interest: that such a man has also in view private advantage, along with public good, as the effect of his action, does no way diminish the benevolence of the action. When he would not have produced so much public good, had it not been for the prospect of self-interest; then the effect of self-love is to be deducted, and his benevolence is proportion'd to the remainder of good, which pure benevolence would have produced. When a man's benevolence is hurtful to himself, then self-love is opposite to benevolence, and the benevolence is proportion'd to the sum of the good produced, and the resistance of self-love surmounted by it. In most cases it is impossible for men to know how far their fellows are influenced by the one or other of these principles; but yet the general truth is sufficiently certain, That this is the way in which the benevolence of actions is

' to be computed. If any enquire, Whence arises this
' love of esteem, or benevolence, to good men, or to
' mankind in general; if not from some nice views of
' self-interest? Or, how we can be mov'd to desire
' the happiness of others, without any view to our
' own? It may be answer'd, That the same cause
' which determines us to pursue happiness for our-
' selves, determines us both to esteem and benevolence
' on their proper occasions; even the very frame of
' our nature, or a generous instinct, which shall be af-
' terwards explained.'

You see the author does not exclude the pursuit of our own happiness; but is labouring to found virtue upon something more divine, and exalted, than self-love. He then proceeds to 'other affections, as fear, ' or reverence, arising from an apprehension of goodness, power, and justice,'—and then goes on to answer the principal objections against his notion. After which he concludes the argument with an ingenious thought about the foundation of what we call national love, or the love of our native country. ' Whatever place, (says he, p. 149.) we have lived in for any considerable time, there we have most distinctly remarked the various affections of human nature; we have known many lovely characters; we remember the associations, friendships, families, natural affections, and other human sentiments. Our moral sense determines us to approve these lovely dispositions where we have most distinctly observ'd them: and

FOUNDATION OF VIRTUE. 13

our benevolence concerns us in the interests of the persons possess'd of them. When we come to observe the like as distinctly in another country, we begin to acquire a national love towards it also; nor has our own country any other preference in our idea, unless it be by an association of the pleasant ideas of our youth, with the buildings, fields, and woods, where we received them. This may let us see how tyranny, and faction, a neglect of justice, a corruption of manners, and any thing which occasions the misery of the subjects, destroys this national love, and the dear idea of a country.'

I shall only add, that what he here calls our moral sense, he has before explained in the former part of his work: and shall conclude with expressing my hope, that this treatise, and another in particular, which has lately appeared with so great and just an applause, may revive and excite in men of fortune and leisure, the study of the philosophy of virtue, and the nature of true religion. This would soon throw a lustre upon their whole conduct. It would give decency to every part of their own behaviour, and happiness to their country, and to all the world around them. I am,

S I R,

Your, &c.

PHILOPATRIS.

16 CONCERNING THE
T O
B R I T A N N I C U S.

S I R,

IT was with great pleasure that I read the letter you lately published from Philopatris, relating to the Inquiry into the original of our ideas of Beauty and Virtue; both because in it he recommends to the world a very ingenious treatise; and because he professes, his design and hopes were to excite the curiosity of men of leisure and inquisitiveness, to enter into such subjects; to study the philosophy of virtue, and the nature of true religion. And I am the more pleased with his design; because I am much afraid, that, without some study and cultivation, the bare moral sense of virtue, which the author of the Inquiry very justly observes to be implanted in men, would continue lurking in their breasts, without ever exerting itself in any constant and regular course of useful and agreeable products. Without this, it may indeed ferment, and annoy them, within: but it will never spring up sufficiently to have any lasting and uniform influence on their actions without. It may make them sensible when they are in the wrong: but it will scarce have force enough to prevail upon them to keep themselves always in the right; unless they will afford some time, and some pains, to consider coolly of it; and suffer themselves to feel the weight of the arguments and reasons for it.

And, as nothing seems to me more likely to stir up the attention of mankind to this study, than the hearing the different opinions of men on such subjects, when they are delivered in a truly philosophical manner; and appear to proceed from a real desire of truth, without any mixture of contention and cavil; I have taken the liberty to send you my thoughts on this subject; leaving it wholly to your judgment, whether they deserve to be conveyed into the world, or not.

I could not but be sensibly touched with the noble design of the author of the Inquiry, to deduce the excellency and obligation of moral actions from one plain and simple principle in nature, which he calls a **MORAL SENSE**. And, allowing his principle, his conclusions are most justly and accurately drawn. But when I considered his principle itself more closely, I could not find in it that certainty, which principles require. I saw indeed, there was some such thing in human nature. But I was at a loss to know how it came there; and whence it arose. I could not be sure, it was not a deceitful and wrong sense. The pleasure arising from the perceptions it afforded, did not seem sufficient to convince me that it was right. For I knew that pleasure was very apt in many things to mislead us, and was always ready to tinge the objects it was concerned in with false and glaring colours. And I could not see any good reason to trust it more in one case, than in another. It appeared to me too uncertain a bottom to venture out

upon, in the stormy and tempestuous sea of passions and interests and affections.

I wanted therefore some further test, some more certain rule, whereby I could judge whether my sense, my moral sense as the author calls it, my taste of things, was right, and agreeable to the truth of things, or not. And till I obtained this satisfaction, I could not rest contented with the bare pleasure and delight it gave me. Nay, indeed, without this, I could not indulge myself in this pleasure, without a secret uneasiness arising from my suspicions of its not being right; and from a kind of constant jealousy I entertain of every pleasure, till I am once satisfied it is a reasonable one.

The perception of pleasure therefore, which is the description this author has given of his moral sense, p. 96, seems to me not to be a certain enough rule to follow. There must be, I should think, something antecedent to justify it, and to render it a real good. It must be a reasonable pleasure, before it be a right one, or fit to be encouraged, or listened to.

If it be so, then it is the reason of the thing, and not the pleasure that accompanies it, which ought to conduct us: and the first question must always be; 'Is 'the action reasonable? Is it fit, that I should allow 'myself to accept of the pleasure it promises me?'

The constitution of all the rational agents that we know of is such indeed, that pleasure is inseparably annexed to the pursuit of what is reasonable. And pleasure ought never to be considered as something inde-

pended on reason ; no more than reason ought to be reckoned unproductive of pleasure. But still the ideas of reason and right are quite different from those of pleasure, and must always in reasoning be considered distinctly : reason as the ground of inward pleasure, and that pleasure as the encouragement to follow reason.

Reason and pleasure may both of them be properly enough styled internal senses ; and, with relation to moral actions, moral senses. But still they must be conceived as different senses : reason, as the sense of the agreement or disagreement of our simple ideas, or of the combinations of them, resulting from their comparison : pleasure, as the sense of joy which any ideas afford us.

Now this internal or moral sense, which we call reason, is the rule by which we judge, and the only rule we can judge by, of truth and falsehood ; and, in moral actions, of moral good or evil, of what is right or wrong, fit or unfit. And the other internal or moral sense of pleasure or pain, whereby we conceive joy in discerning truth, or pain in feeling ourselves embarrassed with falsehood ; or, in moral actions, by reflecting upon in ourselves, or observing in others, moral good or moral evil ; is not itself the rule by which we judge, or can judge, of truth or falsehood, of moral good or evil ; but only the consequence of finding that we judge right, and according to reason. And this latter sense indeed constitutes our idea of beauty ; by which word,

I think, we mean no more than what pleases us.

But things do not seem to us to be true or right, because they are beautiful, or please us ; but seem beautiful, or please us, because they seem to us to be true or right. And always, in our apprehensions of things, (I mean, those apprehensions of things, about which we are now concerned,) the reason of the thing, or the sense of its being true or right, is antecedent to our sense of beauty in it, or of the pleasure it affords us.

Thus, in a theorem, or problem, in geometry, we perceive beauty. But we first discern truth; or we should never find out any beauty in it. And so, in moral science, we first conclude, that a certain action is right : and then it appears to us likewise beautiful. But, while we are in any suspence about it, and doubt whether it is in itself right or wrong ; or if we know it to be wrong ; we can never feel any beauty in it. I do not say, there is always a distance of time between these two sentiments, viz. of truth or right, and beauty. If there is, the perceptions of our mind are often in this case too nimble for us to measure it. But I speak only of the order in which we should consider them, and the dependence they have on one another. And in this sense, I say, beauty, in the nature of things, follows, or depends upon, our previous apprehension of truth, or of right.

It may be said indeed, by way of objection to what I have advanced, ‘ That the sense of beauty or pleasure moves faster than the sense of truth or right :

' that, in particular, the former is immediate upon many moral actions proposed to us; but the latter does not operate but after a long deduction of reasoning, which many are incapable of, who yet discern beauty, and feel pleasure in such actions.' But the answer is pretty easy: it is true, we often find beauty and pleasure in propositions and actions, where there is no truth or right. But then it must be, where we imagine we find truth or right in them. In this we may deceive ourselves: but still that deception is the ground of our sense of beauty or pleasure in such a case, though it may be a false ground. And if we know, or imagine, that there is an absence of truth or right, we shall never feel any such sense of beauty or pleasure there. Sometimes, we perceive truth or right, by a kind of natural penetration and sagacity of the mind, before we have staid to weigh distinctly every one of the steps which lead to it. And then, taking the conclusion for granted, we esteem it beautiful or pleasant.

This may happen to some in the abstruser sciences, who have heads perfectly well turned for them. Whenever a proposition is named to them, if it be not of too complex a nature, they shall immediately discern whether it is true or false, even before they go through every step of the demonstration. And, upon this confidence in their own penetration and sagacity, they shall perceive beauty or pleasure in the proposition. And, when they enquire further, if they find they judged right, it confirms them in that beauty or pleasure.

which they conceived from a more partial and slight view, and encreases it. If they find they judged wrong, the beauty immediately vanishes away, and a sentiment of the contrary succeeds. Few, indeed, are capable of such quick perceptions in those kind of sciences, where the conclusions are forced to pass through many steps. But almost all mankind are capable of them in moral science, where the conclusion and the premises lie within a narrower compass.

To instance in benevolence. Every man, of any degree of understanding, who has observed himself, and others, immediately with one glance of thought, perceives it reasonable and fit, ‘ That the advantage of the whole should be regarded more than a private advantage, or the advantage of a part only of that whole.’ And, taking this quick conclusion for granted, even before he has examined every step that conduces to it, he sees beauty in every moral action by which the advantage of the whole is designed: not because it is advantageous or useful to himself, or even to the whole; but because he sees, or thinks he sees, it to be fit and reasonable that the advantage of the whole should take place. And the beauty he apprehends in the action seems to consist in this, ‘ That it agrees, or seems to agree, with what is in itself fit and reasonable.’ And the more he considers the proposition, viz. ‘ That it is fit and reasonable that the advantage of the whole should ^{be} preferred,’ and, by proving it, feels the truth of it more strongly in his mind;

the more he will be confirmed in esteeming benevolence to be beautiful, as a disposition conduced to that which is fit and reasonable in itself; and the same as to actions proceeding from that disposition. But, if it were possible a mind could be so framed, as to feel the contrary to be truth and right; no doubt, all the beauty of benevolence, or benevolent actions, would immediately vanish out of that mind. And, I am afraid that men may, by long endeavouring to deceive themselves into this false opinion, bring themselves at last to believe it, or at least to imagine they do; and by that means destroy in themselves all sense of beauty in benevolence, as well as work out by degrees the disposition itself which nature has fixed so deeply in their breasts. But I hope there are few such monsters in human nature; or, at least, that ever arrive at the highest pitch of this depravity.

I do not mean by what I have advanced to diminish the force of the strong motives to virtue, arising from the beauty or pleasure which our natural affections make us perceive and feel in morally good actions. I know they are the most successful solicitors to every thing that is right and reasonable, if duly attended to, and not mistaken, or misused. And we should be comfortless and forlorn creatures, if we had no affections and inward warmth of sentiments to spur us on to what dry reason approves of. But I would not have men depend upon their affections as rules sufficient to conduct them, though they are the proper means to animate

them to, and support them in, such a conduct as reason directs. I would have them search still higher for the foundation and ground of those very motives. And I am persuaded they will find that reason is as necessary to account for them, and to justify their effect; as it is needful to guide and direct them afterwards.

And I have no small pleasure in observing, that all the accurate deductions and reasonings of the author of the Inquiry may easily be adapted to the principle here laid down; viz. reason, or our internal sense of truth and falsehood, moral good and evil, right and wrong, accompanied, and fortified, by another succeeding internal sense of beauty and pleasure, feeling those things which are reasonable and true to be at the same time delightful: and, on the reverse, of deformity and pain, terrifying us from following after falsehood, or giving ourselves up to any thing that is unreasonable.

But I find too many thoughts on this subject crowding into my mind, to dispose them within the compass of a letter. And therefore, if it be acceptable, I shall take some further opportunity of addressing myself to you: And, in the mean while, am,

SIR,

Yours, &c.

PHILARETUS.

TO

BRITANNICUS.

SIR,

I SEND you the following thoughts upon the subject of PHILARETUS's letter of April 10, and shall study to imitate his gentlemanly and truly philosophical manner of writing on so useful a subject.

There are certain words frequently used in our discourses of morality, which, I fancy, when well examined, will lead us into the same sentiments with those of the author of the late Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue. The words I mean are these, when we say that actions are reasonable, fit, right, just, conformable to truth. Reason denotes either our power of finding out truth, or a collection of propositions already known to be true. Truths are either speculative, as 'When we discover, by comparing our ideas, the relations of quantities, or of any other objects among themselves;' or practical, as 'When we discover what objects are naturally apt to give any person the highest gratifications, or what means are most effectual to obtain such objects.' Speculative truth or reason is not properly a rule of conduct, however rules may be founded upon it. Let us enquire then into practical reason, both with relation to the end which we propose, and the means.

To a being which acts only for its own happiness, that end is reasonable, which contains a greater happiness than any other which it could pursue; and when such a being satisfies itself with a smaller good for itself, while a greater is in its power, it pursues an unreasonable end. A being of this temper, as to the means, would call those reasonable, which were effectual to obtain their end with the smallest pain or toil to the agent; with such a being, the cruelty of the means, or their bad influence on a community, would never make them pass for unreasonable, provided they had no bad influence on his own happiness.

But if there are any beings, which by the very frame of their nature desire the good of a community, or which are determined by kind affections to study the good of others, and have withal a moral sense, which causes them necessarily to approve such conduct in themselves or others, and count it amiable; and to dislike the contrary conduct as hateful: to such beings, that end is reasonable, which contains the greatest aggregate of public happiness, which an agent can procure; and the pursuing of the good of a small party, or faction, with neglect of more universal good, to such natures would seem unreasonable. If these beings have also self-love, as well as natural benevolence and a moral sense, and at the same time find that their own highest happiness does necessarily arise from kind affections and benevolent actions, that end which would appear reasonable, would be universal happiness, the

very pursuit of which, is supposed to be the greatest happiness to the several agents themselves; for thus both desires are at once gratified, as far as they are capable of doing it by their own actions. By such beings as these, the means of public good will be counted unreasonable, when they occasion evil to the agent, greater than the good obtained by them to the public; or when other means equally in our power might have obtained the same, or an equal public good, with less detriment, either to the agent himself, or to other persons: and, in like manner, the means of private good will be reputed unreasonable by such beings, when they contain a prepotent public evil, or a greater evil towards others, than is contained in means equally effectual for obtaining the same, or equal private good. Under this class of beings, the author of the Inquiry seems to rank our own species, mankind.

If any one should ask concerning public and private good, which of the two is most reasonable? The answer would be various, according to the dispositions of the persons who are passing judgment upon these ends. A being entirely selfish, and without a moral sense, will judge that its own pursuit of its greatest private pleasure is most reasonable. And as to the actions of others, it can see, whether the actions be naturally apt to attain the ends proposed by the agents, or whether their ends interfere with its own ends, or not; but it would never judge of them under any other species than that of advantage, or disadvantage, and only be

affected with them as we are now with a fruitful shower, or a destructive tempest. Such a being might have the abstract idea of public good; but would never perceive any thing amiable in the pursuit of it. The only debate, which such a mind could entertain concerning ends, would be only this, Whether this object or another, would conduce most to its own greatest advantage or pleasure.

But if the same question be proposed to beings who have a moral sense of excellence in public affections, and a desire of public good implanted in their nature; such beings will answer, that it is reasonable that smaller private good should yield to greater public good, and they will disapprove of a contrary conduct: but without this sense and affections, I cannot guess at any reason which should make a being approve of public spirit in another, farther than it might be the means of private good to itself.

If one should still farther enquire, is there not something absolutely reasonable to any possible mind in benevolence, or a study of public good? Is it not absolutely reasonable, that a being who does no evil to others, should not be put to pain by others? It is very probable every man would say, that these things are reasonable. But then, all mankind have this moral sense and public affections. But if there were any natures disjoined from us, who knew all the truths which can be known, but had no moral sense, nor any thing of a superior kind equivalent to it; such natures might

know the constitution of our affairs, and what public and private good did mean ; they would grant, that equal intenseness of pleasure enjoyed by twenty, was a greater sum of happiness than if it were enjoyed only by one ; but to them it would be indifferent, whether one or more enjoyed happiness, if they had no benevolent affections. Such natures might see from the constitution of our affairs, that a social conduct would be the most probable way for each single person of mankind to secure his own happiness, in the neighbourhood of a set of beings like themselves, with social affections, and a sense of honour and virtue ; but these disjoined natures, without a moral sense, would see nothing reasonable in the good affections of one man towards another, abstractly from considerations of the advantage of the virtue to the virtuous agent : and if this disjoined nature observed such a conjuncture, wherein a man who had stupified his moral sense, so as to be above remorse, could with privacy, force, or cunning management, furnish himself with the highest pleasures he then could relish, at the expence of misery to multitudes ; if this disjoined nature had no notion of a good Deity, and of a state of future rewards or punishments, it would see perhaps that the conduct of this man was not apt to promote the public good, nor the reasonable means for that end : but it would also acknowledge that this was reasonable conduct in the agent, in order to obtain private happiness to itself. If there be any other meaning of this word *reasonable*, |

N 15

when apply'd to actions, I should be glad to hear it well explained ; and to know for what reason, besides a moral sense and public affections, any man approves the study of public good in others, or pursues it himself, antecedently to motives of his own private interest.

What has been said of reasonable and unreasonable, may be also applied to that fitness and unfitness of things, which some speak of in their moral writings. It is certain, that abstracting from the observation or relish and approbation of any other mind, some objects are apt or fit to give greater pleasures to the person who enjoys them, than others : it is certain also, that some means are more effectual to obtain an end than others. In this sense, there is a natural fitness and unfitness both in ends and means. Thus one tenor of conduct is naturally more fit among men to promote public good, than another ; and to men, who have a moral sense and public affections, a benevolent conduct is more fit to promote the happiness of the agent than the contrary ; more fit to engage the favour of a good Deity, than a malicious conduct : and any mind whatsoever, who knew our state, and believed a good Deity, might perceive this fitness in benevolence to promote both public happiness and that of the agent, both in this life and the next. But a mind without a moral sense, altho' it saw this natural fitness of benevolence to obtain these ends, would never approve of benevolence, unless this observing mind had kind affec-

tions toward mankind, (so that the happiness of men were an end agreeable to this mind;) or a moral sense did determine it to admire and approve a public spirit wherever it observed it. Without a moral sense, a mind would approve nothing but what was fit for its own ends, altho' it might also observe what was fit to promote the ends of others. That absolute antecedent fitness in the nature of the things themselves, of which some talk, must either mean this sensation of excellence which we necessarily receive by our moral sense, or it is to me perfectly unintelligible, since it is supposed antecedent to any views of private interest, or any sanctions of laws? and for public interests, it must be a moral sense, or a benevolent instinct, which can make any man regard them.

As to the words just, right, and their opposites unjust and wrong, antecedently to any opinion of laws, or views of interest, the same may be said of them which was said of the former words, reasonable, fit, and unfit; they seem to have no other meaning, but agreeable or disagreeable to a moral sense.

As to another character of actions, viz. agreeable to truth, we know that by custom, words or sounds are made signs of ideas, and combinations of words signs of judgments. We know that men generally by words express their sentiments, and profess to speak, as far as they know, according to what is matter of fact; so that their profession is to speak truth. In like manner we judge of actions: we know what is the usual con-

duct of men upon certain occasions, from the dispositions which we generally imagine to be in mankind, if they have the same opinions of objects which we have, and which men generally profess to have: and hence we conclude, from a man's acting otherwise, that he has either other opinions of objects, or other affections than those which we have ourselves, and expect to find in other men.

Thus a man who kills another, who had done him no harm, by his action declares, or gives us occasion to conclude, either that he does not take that object which he treats in this manner to be a man; or if he knows what object he acts upon (as we generally imagine he does on such occasions) he declares, or gives, us ground to conclude, that he has not those affections or that moral sense of actions, which we generally expect in mankind. So that this disagreeableness to truth in such an action, at last must end in a moral sense, unless the person be mad, and really have false appearances of objects.

As to these phrases, treating things as they are, or according to what they are, or are not, they arise from our moral sense. This sense suggests to us what treatment of objects is amiable, and what is odious. Virtue, or a regard to public good, in conformity to this sense, is so universally professed by mankind, and acknowledged to be the only conduct which they can approve, that we say, men do not act suitably to the nature of things who do not pursue public good: but

it is our moral sense of excellence in a public spirit, which suggests to us this idea of suitableness of conduct to natures; which suitableness we involve in the particles *as, according,* and such like. Had we ourselves been wholly selfish, and lived in a system of beings wholly selfish, without a moral sense, in which system we should have had no ground to have expected any regard to the good of each other, in our fellows; their doing evil to each other, or procuring private pleasure by the pains of multitudes, when they had force to do it successfully, would have been treating things as they would have been upon this supposition; nor should we have perceived any opposition to truth in such actions.

It were to be wished that writers would guard against, as far as they can, involving very complex ideas under some short words and particles, which almost escape observation in sentences; such as, *ought, should, as, according;* nay sometimes in our English gerunds, *is to be done, is to be preferr'd,* and such like. Some writers treat the pronoun *his,* as if it were the sign of a simple idea; and yet involve under it the complex ideas of property, and of a right to natural liberty. As the school-men made space and time to vanish into nothings, by hiding them in the adverbs *when* and *where,* or by including them in the compound words *coëxistent, corresponding, &c.*

As to Philaretus's letter, he has not happened to observe the author of the Inquiry's definition of the

moral sense, p. 124th; and seems by this means to have misapprehended him in some things.

As to his questions, ‘ Whence this sense arose?’ The author of the Inquiry takes it to be implanted by the Author of nature. Philaretus wants to be sure that this sense is not deceitful or wrong. If by a wrong or deceitful sense, he means a sense which shall make that pleasant for the present, which shall have pernicious consequences; the author of the Inquiry has attempted to prove, that the pleasures of the moral sense are the most lasting and solid in human life. And, as he does not profess to give a compleat treatise of morality, he recommends to us Cumberland and Puffendorff, who shew that benevolence and a social conduct is the most probable way to secure to each individual, happiness in this life, and the favour of the Deity in any future state to be expected; that so all obstacles to our moral sense, and our kind affections, from false views of interest, may be removed. See page 251 of the Inquiry.

Philaretus wants to know if this moral sense of something amiable in benevolence be right and reasonable, or fit and justifiable. If by these words he means, whether the actions which this sense at any time makes him approve, shall be always approved as morally good by him? The author tells him, that this moral sense and our benevolent affections do make us pursue public good as the end, find our greatest pleasure in such pursuits, and approve of all benevolent actions in others;

but then the author also in many places recommends the most serious application of our reason, to enquire into the natural tendencies of our actions, as the means to attain this end, that we may not be led by every slight appearance of particular good, to do actions which may have prepotent evil consequences. And this inadvertence he makes one great source of immoral actions, which both we ourselves and all others will condemn, when we observe the prepotent evil consequences which the agent might have foreseen. See art. 8, 9, 10, of the third section, and p. 250, and the whole fourth section. If he means, ‘ Will this sense lead me to my own greatest happiness, to a constant self-approbation, and engage the favour of the Deity, if my actions be conformable to this sense, according to the best knowledge of the natural tendencies of my actions?’ The author partly proves this, and partly refers to other writers for what was not to his present design, p. 251. Our moral sense and affections determine our end, but reason must find out the means.

Philaretus thinks, that this sense is not a proper rule. The author recommends to moralists, to examine also into the state of human affairs, to know what course of action will be most effectual to promote public good, the end which our kind affections and moral sense incline us to pursue, p. 253. And if a further rule be necessary, it must come from revelation.

Philaretus fears, that 'this bottom is too uncertain to set out upon, amidst the storms of our passions and self-interests.' The author suggests, that we have benevolent passions as well as selfish; and recommends it to moralists to explain, as he partly does himself, how all our selfish affections would conspire, if we understood our own true interest, to persuade us to the same actions which benevolence excites us to, and our moral sense determines us to approve. And the author of the Inquiry frequently suggests, that in the present state of human nature, many other additional motives to the study of public good are very necessary, besides our moral sense and kind affections. These motives or reasons for pursuing public good, and preferring it to private, which he hints at, are such as some way or other may prove, that the pursuit of public good does most effectually promote the truest interest of the agent, either as the pursuit of public good is acceptable to the Deity, and will be rewarded by him; or as this pursuit gives the agent pleasant reflections upon his own conduct; or, as it engages the love, esteem, and mutual good offices of mankind; and is withal generally consistent with the highest and truest enjoyment of other pleasures, nay, is the very spirit and life of the most of our pleasures: whereas a contrary temper has all the contrary pernicious effects. We have a perception of moral good and evil, of something amiable or hateful in actions, antecedently to any of these

M 13

reasons; and yet the author of the Inquiry knows no other reasons for virtuous actions; and hence he concludes, that our first ideas arise from a sense. All action is designed for some end; if the end be reasonable, and the action, with all its consequences, naturally apt to attain it, the action is reasonable: the end must be either the good of the agent, or of the public, or both consistently with each other. Philaretus owns, that actions are reasonable, fit, right, &c. without regard to the interest of the agent: they are reasonable then with regard to public interests. Now for what reason should the public interest be regarded? What means that *should*? Is it, That this regard to the public is the interest of the agent? or, That it will be rewarded by the Deity?—No: it is fit antecedently—*Fit!* for what end? for public good or private good? Public good, to be sure: because, That the advantage of the whole should take place, is fit. Again, *fit!* for what end?—Not for private, but public good.—Why should I in my actions regard public good?—For what reason?—Why, it is fit for public good that I should do so. In this circle we must run, until we acknowledge the first original of our moral ideas to be from a sense; or, which is to the same purpose, till we acknowledge that they arise from a determination by the Author of nature, which necessitates our minds to approve of public affections, and of consulting the good of others: and then we have room enough for our reason

to direct us in that tenor of action, which shall produce the greatest and most extensive good in our power, and to confirm our public spirit by motives of self-interest, and to prove it to be reasonable in that sense. I mistake Philaretus very much, from his letter, if his zeal for the reasonableness of virtue does not flow from a lively moral sense and very noble affections:

And am his, and your

Most obedient, obliged, servant,

PHILANTHROPIUS.

T O

BRITANNICUS.

SIR,

WHEN I read Philanthropus's letter in the Journals of the 12th and the 19th of June, I was mighty glad to meet with a person of his ingenuity and candour, so willing and so able to examine my sentiments of things. And as I conceive no small hopes, by his means, to be either convinced that I am yet in the wrong, or to be more fully satisfied that I am in the right, by hearing all that he has to say against my opinion; I shall beg the favour of you, if you judge it proper, to convey these speculations to him, by publishing them to the world.

I entirely agree with him as to the method he proposes in arguing on these subjects, viz. to examine into the meaning of the words used in our discourses of morality. And therefore, I will immediately define what I mean by the words which Philanthropus mentions, viz. *reasonable, fit, right, just, conformable to truth*; that we may see whether they stand for the same ideas with him, that they do with me; and that if they do not, we may agree what ideas they shall stand for.

By *reason*, I understand, strictly speaking, that method of thinking, whereby the mind discovers such

truths as are not self-evident, by the intervention of self-evident truths ; and such truths as are less evident, by such as are already supposed to be more so. The perception of evident truths, is knowledge ; which is therefore acquired and improved by reasoning, i. e. by connecting remote or less evident truths with self-evident or more evident ones. All propositions which we perceive as true, whether immediately, or by the means of other intermediate perceptions, we call truths. They are all, strictly speaking, speculative ; i. e. they are seen and perceived by the mind. But when such truths are relative to the actions of rational agents, they are in common usage stil'd practical truths. And they are always the conclusions made from those, which, by way of distinction are called speculative truths. Speculative truths are not themselves rules of action, but only the practical truths (or conclusions) drawn from them. The instance which Philanthropus gives of practical truth, according to these definitions, seems rather to belong to speculative truth. For the ' discovering what objects are naturally apt to give any person the highest gratifications, or what means are most effectual to obtain such objects,' is discovering the same species of truth with the relations of quantities, or of any other objects among themselves, both speculative truths, or theorems. But the inferring from thence in what manner persons are obliged to act towards such objects, or what means they are obliged to employ, in order to obtain them, would

be the discovering practical truths properly so called. Reasonable, signifies the result of employing reason. Thinking according to this result, is called thinking reasonably: and acting according to it, acting reasonably. Sometimes indeed the word *reason* is used to signify the faculty of reasoning, or of employing reason. But this is in a less proper and strict sense. When again the word *reason* is used 'to denote a collection of propositions already known to be true,' it is likewise improperly and figuratively used, and means no more than reasonable, or the result of reasoning.

Now I think it will plainly follow from this definition of the word *reasonable*, if it be a right one, that the reasonableness of the ends of moral agents does not depend on their conformity to the natural affections of the agent, nor to a moral sense representing such ends as amiable to him; but singly on their conformity to reason. Reason would always represent the end in the same manner to the rational agent, whatever his affections, or inward sense of amiableness, were. And, supposing a being framed so as to have only selfish affections, and yet to be endued with a faculty of reasoning; such a being, if he employs that faculty, must see it to be highly unreasonable that his private interest or pleasure should take place to the destruction of the interest or pleasure of all other beings like himself; tho' for want of kind affections, he would be void of any collateral disposition to act in that manner, which to his understanding must necessarily appear reasonable. Nay,

such a being would perceive his natural affections to be very unreasonable affections. I do not believe indeed he could possibly have a sense of amiableness in a conduct agreeable to such affections ; because it seems absurd that any thing should appear amiable to a rational creature which so evidently contradicted reason. But if he could be supposed to have such a sense, it would be a sense as unreasonable as his affections were. And neither of them, nor both together, could possibly render a conduct pursuant to them reasonable.

That which perhaps may be apt to mislead us in this point is, That we find in fact it is always reasonable to act according to natural affection, and the moral sense. And thence we may too hastily conclude, that such a conduct is reasonable, for this reason, because our natural affections and moral sense move us to it, But, if we examine more closely, I believe we shall find the reverse to be the truth, viz. That we deem our affections and our moral sense to be reasonable affections, and a reasonable sense, from their prompting us to the same conduct which reason approves and directs. And thus reason is the measure of the goodness or badness of our affections, and moral sense, and consequently of the actions flowing from them, and not *vice versa*.

Philanthropus acknowledges that 'every man would say that benevolence, or a study of public good, is absolutely reasonable to any possible mind.' But he thinks they would say so, only because all mankind have a

moral sense and public affections. And he thinks they would not say so, if they had not ; but would be indifferent.

I agree with him, that they would be indifferent as to any affection they would feel towards others, disposing them to do or to wish them any good. But they would not, they could not, be indifferent as to perceiving it reasonable that the public good should be preferred to private good ; and consequently, that it was in itself reasonable that every rational agent should study the public good. They would not only see the speculative truth, That an equal intenseness of pleasure enjoyed by twenty was a greater sum of happiness, than if it were enjoyed only by one. But they would likewise see this practical truth to be the consequence of it, ' That it was therefore reasonable that the happiness of the twenty should be considered preferably by all rational agents to the happiness of the one, where all things else were supposed equal, and there were no peculiar circumstances to justify a distinction.'

And it is from this perception of the reasonableness of regarding the happiness of many more than the happiness of a few, that we discern and admire the wisdom of our Maker, in implanting social and public affections in his creatures, to be subservient to this wise and reasonable end. Whereas, if we had not this previous apprehension of reasonableness, antecedent to, and independent on, any affections, or sense of them, we could not judge it to be more wise or reasonable to have be-

stowed such social affections on men, than to have given them only selfish affections, prompting them to take care of themselves alone, without any respect to the ‘cruelty of the means, or the bad influence on a community.’ In short, without such a previous apprehension of what is reasonable in itself, all conceivable constitutions of creatures would have been equally wise; which is evidently absurd.

Reasonable therefore, when said of actions, or of the ends of rational agents, denotes the agreeableness of those actions, and those ends, not to the natural affections of such agents, nor to a moral sense rendering the compliance with those affections amiable; but to reason only. And those affections, as well as that moral sense, are themselves denominated reasonable, when they move us to such actions, or ends, as reason prescribes to us, and direct us to; and must be stiled unreasonable, if they diverted us from them, or disposed us to the contrary.

The next word, *fit*, is a relative word, expressing the relation of means to an end. And therefore an absolute antecedent fitness in the nature of things, meaning thereby antecedent to any end, either existing, or in supposition, is absolute nonsense. But when moralists speak of antecedent fitness, they mean only antecedent to the actual constitution of things, and fit upon supposition of certain circumstances existing, which perhaps may never really exist. As for instance; if never any creatures had been produced, it would ne-

tertheless have been always antecedently true, that, if they should ever be so and so constituted, it would be fit that they should act towards one another in such and such a manner. For, upon supposition that the perfectly wise and good author of nature should produce any rational agents, it was always antecedently fit that they should use the best means to happiness, since their happiness must be the chief end for which the wise and good Author would bring them into being. And, further, supposing they should be framed with natural affections leading to this end, it was likewise antecedently fit that they should exercise those affections, and follow their motions; not barely because they are supposed to have such affections, (for that consideration alone discovers no end, and consequently no fitness) but because they are supposed to have such affections leading to such an end. It is not fit that they should perform such offices, barely because they have such affections. But, because it was antecedently fit, that they should perform such offices, it was likewise fit that they should be endued with such affections. And, for the same reason, it was fit that they should exert those affections when they have them.

This explanation of the word *fit* may easily clear up that seeming circle which Philanthropus observes in arguing upon this proposition, ‘It is fit that the advantage of the whole should take place.’ Fit, says he, for what end?—Not for private, but public good.

Now indeed to argue that it is fit for public good, that public good should take place, is arguing in a circle, and proving nothing. But, if we consider that, when we say, ‘ It is fit that public good should be regarded,’ the end to which the fitness there relates is not public good considered barely in itself; but the wise and good end of the Creator, to render all his creatures as happy as their constitution will admit of: then it will be no circle, to argue that the regard of public good is a fit means for obtaining this wise and good end of the Creator. If the question be, Why should I in my actions regard public good?—The proper and first answer is, ‘ Because it is the fit means of obtaining the public good, that every constituent member of that public should regard it.’ But if it be further demanded—Why ought the public good to be sought after?—Then the right answer is,—‘ Because it is fit for the accomplishing the wise end of our Creator, to make all his creatures happy, that it should be so.’ And if it be further urged—‘ Why is that end to be regarded?’ The answer is—‘ Because it is a wise and reasonable end.’

Indeed the fitness of means to an end lays no obligation, but as the end is reasonable. And therefore when moralists say that any thing is antecedently fit, they always suppose the end to be reasonable. Means may be very apt to promote a very unreasonable end. But, in a moral sense of the word, such means would

never be said to be fit, and far less to constitute such an antecedent fitness as moralists speak of in their writings. I will trouble you with what remains, next week, and am,

Yours, &c.

PHILARETUS.

T O

BRITANNICUS.

SIR,

TH E next to be considered is the word *right*, which denotes nothing more in effect than reasonable; only taking it for granted that reason represents to us the nature of things truly as it is.

The word *just* denotes only right applied specially to what we owe to other persons. And therefore, what has been said of the word *reasonable*, may be applied to these words *right* and *just*.

The expression *agreeable to truth*, when used with respect to actions, is to the same effect with *agreeable to reason*. For, though truth, meaning thereby such propositions as express the nature of things as it is, is the real foundation of all moral good or evil; yet, as this truth must be apprehended by the agent, before it can be a rule for his actions, so truth considered as a rule to act by, i. e. moral truth, is the same with reason, or what reason dictates. And *acting agreeably to truth*, can mean no more than acting agreeably to our knowledge of it, i. e. to reason; for reason leads us to that knowledge. Reason informs us how things are, as far as it goes. And if we treat things not as our reason tells us they are, but as our reason tells us they are not, we act contrary to our apprehension of truth,

or to moral truth; and, acting therein perversely, become morally evil agents: whereas, if we act the reverse, we are denominated morally good agents. Acting contrary to our natural affections does not immediately render us morally evil agents, nor acting agreeably to them morally good agents; because our affections do not of themselves immediately inform us how things are, or are not. But, mediately, the acting agreeably or disagreeably to them, may denominate us morally good or morally evil, as those affections are indications of the will and design of our Creator; and as the acting in opposition to his will, is acting as if he had not been our benefactor, and as if we owed him no return of gratitude and obedience. And, further, the thwarting our natural affections may constitute us morally evil agents, as being in effect the denying that we have such affections, by acting as if we had them not. And, in this case, the moral evil will consist in acting contrary to this truth, that we have such affections. But still all this supposes these affections to be good, right, reasonable affections. For, if they are not so, then the thwarting them will not render us evil, but good agents. For in that case, reason would be a much surer indication of the will and design of our Creator, than the affections can be: and the acting as if we had not natural evil affections would render us morally good agents.

But, as such a supposition of natural evil affections can only be put for argument's sake, and can never really exist; it being impossible that a wise and good

50 CONCERNING THE

Being should give his creatures a natural bias to evil ; the conclusions from reason, and from natural affection duly examined, will always be the same : for the natural affections, and the moral sense attending them, are so ordered by the Author of nature, that they coincide with the dictates of reason. And therefore, whatever follows from the consideration of their movements, will likewise follow from a due attention to the discoveries of truth which our reason will open to us. The only difference is, that the one is a sufficient principle to argue from ; the other is not. For, when, in the regress of the analysis, as I may call it, we arrive at natural affections, or a moral sense accompanying them, and take them for our ultimate principle ; we do not feel sufficient satisfaction to make any demonstrative conclusion from them : whereas, when we go back to reason in our investigation, i. e. when we resolve the propositions into self-evident or evident truths, then we find no further doubt in our mind, but meet with a principle which we cannot but acquiesce in. In one case, we still leave our principle to be proved. In the other, we reach a principle, which is self-evident, or certainly demonstrable. When we have observed certain natural affections in ourselves, the question still remains, whether these natural affections are good or evil, right or wrong, i. e. agreeable to reason, or disagreeable to it, which requires further proof to determine it : but when we rest our foot upon such truths as are evident or demonstrated, we leave nothing un-

Wh. L. is
our basis?

proved; but arrive at as much certainty as we are capable of, and can go no farther.

Thus I have examined all the terms which Philanthropus proposes. And, as I understand them, they would lead me to look upon reason as that which alone discovers and delivers to us the proper rule and measure of action; as that which lays the proper, and indeed, strictly speaking, the only obligation upon us to act in a certain manner; since we are always self-condemned, whenever we contradict its conclusions and directions. And, as for all those natural affections, whether social or selfish, which the Author of our nature has interwoven in our frame, all the consequent relishes and tastes which he has endued us with; they are indeed additional motives to right acting, as they render our duty pleasant and comfortable to us, and the contrary displeasing and comfortless; they render us the more inexcusable in departing from the rules of reason, since they were given us to promote the observance of them: but they can never fix upon us any proper and strict obligation, farther than as they are made objects of reason, and furnish us with topics to reason from, and are found to agree with reason.

And, I believe, if we consider the matter closely, we shall find that we cannot so much as form an idea of obligation, without introducing reason as its foundation. Supposing we have natural affections disposing us to certain actions, how are we obliged to comply with such dispositions?—Why—because it is reason-

able to do so. Have we a moral sense, or relish, for such actions and dispositions? How are we obliged to gratify that relish? Why—it is reasonable to gratify it. How are we at all obliged to consult our own interest or pleasure? Are we not at liberty to give up that interest or pleasure?—No—it is unreasonable to do it—we are self-condemned if we do it in such and such cases. And therefore, we are obliged in such cases not to do it. In short, all sort of obligation to any thing, implies some reason to give it force, without which it is a mere phantom of the imagination.

Philanthropus thinks, I have not 'happened to observe the author of the Inquiry's definition of the moral sense, p. 124, and that I have by this means misapprehended him in something.' If I have, I shall be extremely glad to be set right. But I think I have all along understood him to mean by his moral sense, as he defines it, 'A determination of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions, when they occur to our observation, antecedently to any opinions of advantage or loss to redound to ourselves from them.' That there is such a sense implanted in us by the Author of our nature, I make no question. I believe every one may feel it in himself. And when I asked, whence this sense arose? I did not mean to express any doubt about its existence; but only to signify the necessity of inquiring into the original of it, in order to determine whether it was a right sense, or not; by which I meant, whether it prompted us to

* *Our own 'Obligation' always has this reference to some person or persons?*

right actions, or to judge rightly of actions, or not ; and whether the actions, or agents, in which it delighted, or to which it was averse, were really morally good or morally evil in themselves : the test of which inquiry, I took to be reason ; and that this sense was good or bad, right or wrong, as it agreed or disagreed with reason ; and not reason, as it agreed or disagreed with this sense. As to Philanthropus's admonition against squeezing too much meaning into some short words and particles, by which means the crowded sense often passes almost unobserved in the sentence, I think it very just ; and have endeavoured to avoid that fault in writing this, as much as I could.

I am persuaded that Philanthropus is no more an enemy to the reasonableness of virtue, than I am to the amiableness of it. But the question at present is, 'From what principle moral obligation is to be deduced ; and what it is that immediately denominates actions, and agents, morally good, or morally evil.' In which inquiry I shall always be glad of, as I shall be ever ready to receive, further information from so ingenious a writer as Philanthropus.

I am, Sir,

his and your obliged

humble servant,

PHILARETUS.

TO

BRITANNICUS.

SIR,

AFTER hearty thanks to Philaretus for engaging me in a further inquiry into the foundation of virtue, please to communicate to him these thoughts on his letters of July and August 7.

Our debate is drawn into narrower bounds, by his reducing ultimately all other moral attributes of actions to reasonableness or conformity to truth. I allow his definitions; nor do I apprehend he would have disallowed my instance of practical truth, had he defined the word obligation.

The reasonableness of an action, or its conformity to truth, or the power of finding out truth, I fancy needs further explication. True propositions may be made concerning all objects, good or evil; there must be a conformity between every true proposition and its object: if then all conformity between an object and a truth, be goodness, all objects must be good. If there be any particular kind of conformity which constitutes moral goodness, I wish it were explained, and distinguished from that conformity between every object of our knowledge and the truths which we know.

In every truth some attribute is affirmed or denied of its subject. In truths about actions some attribute

is affirmed or denied of actions. Whatever attribute is affirmed of any action, the contrary attribute may be as truly affirmed of the contrary action or omission: both these propositions shall be true, and their objects, viz. the actions, shall be conformable to them. If then this conformity be moral goodness, the most contrary actions shall both be good, being both conformable to their several truths: this conformity then cannot denominate the one good more than the other. It must be some other attribute, which can be ascribed to one, and not to the other, which must make the distinction, and not the agreeing with a truth; for any one may make as many truths about villainy as about heroism, by ascribing to it the contrary attributes.

But not to pass over this debate with a logical or metaphysical argument. When we ask the reason of an action, we sometimes mean the truth which excites the agent to it, by shewing that it is apt to gratify some inclination of his mind. Thus, why does a sensual man pursue wealth? The reason, in this meaning of the word, is this truth, viz. wealth is useful to purchase pleasures. At other times, by the reason of actions we mean, the truth which shews a quality in the action of any person, engaging the approbation either of the agent or the spectator; or which shews it to be morally good. Thus why do I observe the contracts I have made? The reason is this, ' Mutual observation of contracts is necessary to preserve society.' The for-

mer reasons, after Grotius, I call exciting reasons, the latter justifying reasons.

Now Philaretus seems to me to maintain, ‘That there is some exciting reason to virtue, antecedent to all kind affections, or instinct toward the good of others: and that in like manner there are some justifying reasons, or truths, antecedent to any moral sense, causing approbation.’ The author of the Inquiry, I apprehend, must maintain, ‘that desires, affections, instincts, must be previous to all exciting reasons; and a moral sense antecedent to all justifying reasons.’

The exciting reasons are such as shew an action to be fit to attain its end: but nothing can be an end previous to all desires, affections, or instincts, determining us to pursue it: they must then be previous to all exciting reasons or truths, unless we say that there may be exciting reasons to actions, where no end is intended; or that ends are intended previously to all desire or affection.

But are there not exciting reasons even antecedent to any end, moving us to propose one end rather than another? To this Aristotle long ago answered, that there are ultimate ends, not desired with a view to anything further; and subordinate ends, desired with a view to something further. There are exciting reasons, or truths, about subordinate ends, shewing their tendency toward the ultimate end; but as to the ultimate ends, there is no truth or reason exciting us to pursue them. Were there exciting reasons for all ends,

there could be no ultimate end; but we should desire one thing for the sake of another in an infinite series.

Thus, ask a being who has selfish affections, why he pursues wealth? He will assign this truth as his exciting reason, 'that wealth furnishes pleasures or happiness.' Ask again, why he desires his own happiness or pleasure? I cannot divine what proposition he would assign as the reason moving him to it. This is indeed a true proposition, 'There is a quality in his nature moving him to pursue happiness;' but it is this quality or instinct in his nature which moves him, and not this proposition. Just so this is a truth, 'that a certain medicine cures an ague;' but it is not a proposition which cures the ague, nor is it any reflection or knowledge of our own nature which excites us to pursue happiness.

If this being have also public affections; what are the exciting reasons for observing faith, or hazarding his life in war? He will assign this truth as a reason, 'Such conduct tends to the good of mankind' Go a step further, why does he pursue the good of mankind? If his affections be really disinterested, without any selfish view, he has no exciting reason; the public good is an ultimate end to this series of desires.

When Philaretus, to evade a circle, brings in the end of the Deity, as a reason of pursuing public good; if he means an exciting reason, let him express the truth exciting men to pursue the end proposed by the Deity. Is it this, 'No creature can be happy who

' counteracts it ?' This is a reason of self-love exciting all who consider it. But again, what reason excites men to pursue their own happiness ? Here we must end in an instinct. Is this the truth, ' The Deity is my ' benefactor ?' I ask again the reason exciting to love or obey benefactors ? Here again we must land in an instinct. Is this the truth, ' The end of the Deity is a ' reasonable end ?' I ask again, what is the truth, a conformity to which makes the desire of public good reasonable in the Deity ? What truth either excites or justifies the Deity in this desire ? As soon as I hear a pertinent proposition of this kind, I shall recant all I have said. If the exciting reason of mens complying with the Deity be this truth, ' Men are obliged to comply, or it is their duty ;' then we are excited because we are obliged, or bound in duty ; and not because it is reasonable so to do, or because it is conformable to a truth. For this also is a truth, ' Disobedience is contrary to obligation ;' yet no body imagines that conformity to this truth, either makes disobedience morally good, or excites to pursue it. But whoever will define the words, oblige, owe, duty, will find himself at as great a loss for ultimate exciting reasons, previous to affections, as ever.

In like manner, where he says, ' that to a being void of public affections, the pursuing the happiness of twenty, rather than his own, is reasonable ;' I want to know the truth exciting such a nature to pursue it. Sure it is not this, that ' the sum of twenty fe-

' licities is a greater quantity than any one of them.' For unless by a public affection the happiness of others be made desirable to him, the prospect of a great sum in the possession of others will never excite him ; more than the knowledge of this truth, ' That one hundred equal stones are a greater bulk than one,' will excite a man, who has no desire of heaps, to cast them together.

If Philaretus intended in these two last cases justifying reasons, then it leads to the next part of our debate, about justifying reasons : the true way of deciding it, is not a frequent assertion, ' that we approve actions antecedently to a sense ; ' but producing the very truths for conformity to which we approve actions ultimately. Here the former argument might be repeated, ' that we may form true propositions concerning all sorts of actions good or evil : each sort of action is conformable to the truths formed concerning it ; this conformity then cannot distinguish good actions from evil.' But to pass this argument.

Philaretus owns, that ' truths which only shew an action to be fit to attain its end, do not justify it.' The justifying truths must be about the ends themselves. Now what are the justifying truths about ultimate ends ? What is the truth, for conformity to which we approve the desire of public good as an end, or call it a reasonable end ? Is it this, ' Public good is a reasonable end ?' This amounts to a very trifling argument, viz. it is reasonable because it is reasonable.

Good.

Is it this one; ‘This desire excites to actions which really do promote public happiness?’ Then, for conformity to what truth do men approve the promoting of public happiness? Is it this truth, ‘Public happiness includes that of the agent?’ This is only an exciting reason to self-love. Is this the justifying truth, ‘Public happiness is the end of the Deity?’ The question returns, What truth justifies concurrence with the divine ends? Is it this, ‘The Deity is our benefactor?’ Then what truth justifies concurrence with benefactors? Here we must end in a sense. Or shall we assign this reason, ‘Concurrence with the divine ends is morally good, because those ends are reasonable ends?’ Then what is the reason or truth, for conformity to which we call the divine ends reasonable? They are not good or conformable to reason, because he wills them to be so. Here I own, I must ultimately resolve all approbation into a moral sense, as I was forced to resolve all exciting reasons into instincts.

Philaretus often insinuates two objections; 1st, ‘There must be some antecedent standard, by which we judge the affections or moral senses themselves to be right or wrong.’ As to affections, we judge of them ultimately by the moral sense, according as they are kind or malicious. But as to the moral sense itself, it can no more be called morally good or evil, than we call the sense of tasting, sweet or bitter. Each per-

son judges the sense of others by his own: but no man can immediately judge of his own moral sense, or sense of tasting, whether they be right or wrong. Reason may shew men, that their moral sense, as it is now constituted, tends to make the species happy; and that a contrary sense would have been pernicious; and therefore we may, by a metonymie, call it happy, as we call our taste healthy, when it leads us to delight in objects tending to our health.

The other objection is this, 'that if there is no moral standard antecedent to a sense, then all constitutions of senses had been alike good and reasonable in the Deity.' To this it may be answered, that we can conceive no exciting reasons of the divine actions, antecedent to something in the divine nature, of a nobler kind, corresponding to our kindness and sweetest affections; by which the Deity desires universal happiness as an end. The divine wisdom did, no doubt, suggest the implanting of such a sense in men, to be the fittest means of obtaining this end. The justifying reasons of the divine actions, when we judge of them, must end in our moral sense, which makes us approve such a kind beneficent constitution of our nature. Had we wanted a moral sense, yet the Deity might have judged of his own actions as he does now; but we should have had no moral ideas, either concerning the Deity, or ourselves. Our reason might have suggested indeed, that if the Deity did study our

happiness as an end, the omitting to give us such a sense, if we could have had an idea of it, was omitting the proper means for obtaining his end. But moral good or evil would have been to us unknown.

I am his and your

very humble servant,

PHILANTHROPUS.

TO

BRITANNICUS.

SIR,

If you are not already tired with this debate yourself, I would by your means presume once more on Philanthropus's patience; and beg you to convey these thoughts to him, in answer to his last letter of Oct. 9.

He observes rightly, that the argument is drawn into narrower bounds; and seems willing to put the issue of the whole upon this single question, 'Whether, 'or no, there are reasons previous to all desires, affections, instincts, or any moral sense arising from them?'

The question then is, 'Whether truth, apprehended by our reason, is the principle from which we must argue to prove any thing to be morally good or evil; or whether our desires, affections, instincts, and a moral sense attending them, distinct from the faculty of reason, compose that principle?'

Philanthropus thinks, truth cannot be the principle; because 'we may form true propositions concerning all sorts of actions, good and evil; and each sort of action is conformable to the truths formed concerning it: and therefore this conformity cannot distinguish good actions from evil.—But, upon this principle,

' all objects must be good.—And the most contrary actions shall be both good.' This is the substance of his logical or metaphysical argument.

But he, by a great mistake here, puts the conformity, or agreeing with a truth, i. e. any one single truth; for the conformity with truth, as truth signifies the true state and connexion and relation of things, taken all together. For, when it is said that moral goodness consists in the acting in conformity to truth; the meaning is not, that it consists in a conformity to any one single and detached true proposition, but to the whole chain and compages of truth; in acting agreeably to the state and connexion and mutual relation of things.

For instance, though it is a true proposition, ' that such an action gives me pleasure ;' yet it may not be a morally good action, because it may contradict and interfere with other truths; as, ' That, tho' it pleases me, it hurts another ;' and, ' That the nature of that other requires pleasure as well as mine ;' or, ' That, though it gratifies me for the present, it may probably be followed by pain afterwards ;' and the like : and because it may be contradictory to the nature and constitution of things, which is the chain and series of truth.

But, not to dwell longer on this logical or metaphysical objection, (which is entirely founded upon his mistaking the sole idea which is annexed to the word

truth in this question,) I shall proceed to examine his moral objections.

Philanthropus divides reasons for actions, after Grotius, into two sorts; exciting reasons, and justifying reasons. And I am willing to follow him in this partition: though, in truth, the exciting reason to an action, and the justifying reason for it, ought always to be the same in substance, and should only differ in the form of putting them. The exciting reason should amount to this, in order to be a valid reason; ‘This action is right, therefore I will do it;’ and the justifying reason, ‘It was right, therefore I did right in doing it.’

But the dispute is, what method we are to take to prove that this action is, or was, right.

Now this I would prove from its conformity to the nature and constitution of things, about which I form in my mind certain true propositions; and thence call it truth. And in this disquisition I would take into consideration my own nature; the nature of things without me; and my relation to them, and theirs to me. And under this head all natural desires, affections, passions, appetites, instincts, relishes and senses, both in myself and others, come to be examined, as indications of the condition and end of nature. And when, from all these considerations, I find certain true propositions resulting, concerning the nature of things; then moral goodness, I say, consists in acting agreeably

to those true propositions, and moral badness in acting disagreeably to them.

But Philanthropus thinks this point may be proved singly from the ends which our desires and affections propose to us; and from a moral sense, or taste, approving of what is agreeable to them: wherein I think he wants ground to rest upon. He esteems that to be the whole proof, which seems to me but a branch of the reasoning; and the quarry whence we are to fetch some of the materials which help us in examining those propositions which are the foundations of our rules for acting.

He proceeds to sustain his own, and overturn the contrary opinion, by this principle, 'That there can be no exciting reason to an ultimate end?' In which I agree with him and Aristotle: * But the very point in question is, 'What is, or ought to be, the ultimate end of actions.' And the greatest part of moral goodness consists in choosing a right ultimate end. He who proposes his pleasure as his ultimate end, can scarce be a very good man: whereas he who makes truth his ultimate end, can scarce be a bad man. He acts like a rational creature, and does not desire or wish that truth may lie on this side or that side of the question; but studiously and sincerely pursues it whithersoever it leads him.

The question is not, what is seen in experience to lead men to act. I confess, their passions and affections

* Nicomach. Ethic. lib. i. c. 1.

generally do lead them. And it is their happiness, and the wisdom of their Creator, that they have such affections and passions as naturally tend, till they corrupt them, to produce in many instances the same effects, which reason both dictates before, and approves afterwards. But still 'tis reason alone which informs us beforehand that such actions would be right, as well as afterwards that such actions were right. And of this indeed I think there can be no doubt to any one who has ever felt reason working in his breast.

Philanthropus observes, that 'to avoid a circle I bring in the end of the Deity.' But I must remind him that this was only under the definition of the word *fit*; which being a relative word, respecting some end or other, must have a correlative answering it: whereas the words *true*, *reasonable*, *right*, are absolute and not relative terms, and therefore need no correlate. Now I said, if we form this proposition, 'It is fit that public good should be regarded,' it must be fit for the attaining some end. And this fitness is a moral fitness, and right in itself, if the end be a wise and reasonable end. I mentioned the Deity, not as meaning that this end was wise, because it was the end of the Deity; but because all ends must subsist in some intelligent agent; and the Deity is an intelligent agent, who is perfectly wise, and always proposes wise ends to himself.

Philanthropus proceeds to ask, 'What is the truth exciting men to pursue the end proposed by the

‘ Deity?’ And he offers me my choice of several truths, which though they are all very weighty truths, yet are not those I should chuse to build upon in this argument. The single truth I would pitch upon is, ‘ Because the end is a reasonable end :’ and the truth, which makes this end, (viz. public good or happiness) a reasonable end is, ‘ That it is best, that all should be happy.’ This is the ‘ truth, a conformity to which makes the desire of public good reasonable in the Deity ;’ and, I add, in all rational creatures, who would imitate the wisdom and goodness of the Deity.

If any one asks, Why it is best ? I would answer him, as I would do, if he asked me, why four is more than two ? It is self-evident. I should be sorry indeed to argue, as Philanthropus afterwards puts it, ‘ That public good is a reasonable end, because it is a reasonable end.’ I should think it sufficient to prove it to be best, and should not be afraid of affirming it to be reasonable to pursue what is best. The only point is to prove what is best. And this can only be done, by considering and examining by reason, not feeling by instinct or sense, how the matter of fact stands, and what is actually best in itself. Just as when I am examining, whether I ought to assent to a proposition ; I would not say, It is true, because it is true : but would consider the evidence of it ; and if I perceived it to be true, would assent to it.

The self-evident truth then, ‘ That it is in itself best that all should be happy,’ is immediately per-

ceivable by all rational natures. But the question of fact, wherein that best consists, makes the difference of more or less moral goodness in intelligent agents, according to the greater or narrower extent of their knowledge; considered together with their disposition to act, and, in fact, acting agreeably to their knowledge; and also using the means to acquire and improve that knowledge. In this the all-knowing Author of Nature, being infallible and unchangable, he is most perfectly good in a moral sense. Inferior beings are, more or less, capable of being so, proportionably to their capacity of knowledge: and are, in fact, morally good or evil, as they act according to, or contrary to, that knowledge which they are possessed of, or may acquire.

But that which I fancy misleads Philanthropus in this point is, that by exciting, he means, exciting as the passions and affections do, by giving us uneasiness when we do not follow their movements; (which is indeed a guard to our virtue, but not the ground of it:) whereas by reason's exciting, I mean only its proposing an action to us as most eligible and right; which, though it may be attended with pleasure or uneasiness from an additional moral sense, yet is distinct from it, and not dependent upon it. And on the same ground he often confounds a thing's being desireable to us, with its being esteemed reasonable by us: whereas men often desire what they think, and are conscious, is very unreasonable; and know that to be very reason-

able, which they by no means desire. For which I appeal to the common experience of mankind.

What I have said about exciting reasons, may be easily applied to all that Philanthropus demands, concerning justifying reasons; and therefore I need not consume the time in doing it; nor mistrust the judgment of my readers so far. But I may possibly say more on this head, if ever I come to examine Philanthropus's answers to the two objections, which he says I often insinuate.

I shall conclude at present, with giving my meaning of the word Obligation, since Philanthropus desires it more than once; though I thought I had in effect done it in my last.

Obligation is a word of a Latin original, signifying the action of binding; which therefore, in a moral sense, (for the question here is not about corporal force) must import the binding an intelligent agent by some law; which can be no other than that of reason. For all other ties are reducible to this; and this is primary, and reducible to no other principle. I find I can thwart my desires and affections, and yet approve what I do in contradiction to them. I can approve of actions by a moral sense; and yet, upon examination by reason, rectify that sense, as I can my external senses; and condemn what it approved. But my reason I can never contradict, but it flies in my face; I stand self-condemned, and bring myself in guilty, though all the earth should acquit me. And I never heartily comply

with its dictates, but I acquit myself, though all the world should condemn me. And I do not find, that desire, or affection, or passion, or any kind of sensation, has any influence in the case; except it be, to increase or diminish pleasure and self-complacency, as we comply with, or reject the dictates of reason, and are thereby a kind of natural rewards and punishments; or, perhaps, to extenuate our guilt, and excuse us in some degree, on the strength and violence of the temptation. I am,

SIR,

Yours, &c.

PHILARETUS.

E 4

and I have done: Abijah, it was I said, you may
see, and I have done; and I have **T O** you, and you have done
nothing to me, but to make you think that I have done
B R I T A N N I C U S.

S I R,

I Would fain, methinks, clear the account I have,
in several former letters, given of the basis and
groundwork of true virtue, from all seeming and plau-
sible difficulties: and therefore, I now beg leave to
conclude, by examining the answers which Philanthro-
pus gives to the two objections, he says, I often insi-
nuated.

The first objection is, ‘That there must be a stan-
dard to judge of the affections and moral senses
themselves, whether they are right or wrong.’

To this Philanthropus returns for answer, That
‘we judge of the affections by the moral sense. But,
‘as to the moral sense itself, it can no more be called
‘morally good or evil, than we call the sense of tast-
‘ing, sweet or bitter.—No man can immediately
‘judge of his own moral sense, or sense of tasting,
‘whether they be right or wrong.’

Now, the question is not, whether the moral sense
can be called morally good or evil, which I admit it
cannot, properly and strictly speaking; because moral
good and evil belong to agents, and their actions, not
to affections or inclinations. For the person chuses;
and his action arises from his own choice: and there-

fore he is accountable. But his affection, or inclination, or sense, is implanted in him, and not in his own power: and therefore he is not accountable either for having it, or for wanting it; and consequently it has nothing moral in it; since morality implies the being accountable and answerable; and cannot take place where force is used, or power is wanting. A man is no more a morally good man for being made affectionate, than for being made hungry when his stomach is craving. But, as hunger prompts us to eat when the machine requires repair, where perhaps reason might forget or neglect it, were it left to itself; so natural affection, and the sentiments belonging to it, urge us to render good offices to others, which our reason, tho' it approves them, and even proposes them to our thoughts as the best things we can do, yet might be too slack and remiss in stirring us to perform them, without such indefatigable solicitors continually prompting us. But still the doing such good offices is a morally good action; not because affection, or sentiment, inclines us so, (for then cruelty, in case a cruel affection, or sentiment, was natural to us, would be morally good too;) but because our mind perceives it to be best to do so; perceiving immediately, and intuitively, this truth; 'That it is best that the species should be happy;' and deducing this further truth by reason, 'That benevolence is the properest and fittest means to procure the happiness of the species.'

But the true question is, 'Whether the moral sense

' may be called right or wrong, or not.' For we grant it cannot be properly called morally good or evil. And this it certainly may, as well as any other sense. It is not parallel to the calling the sense of tasting, sweet or bitter; as *Philanthropus* has wrongly put it, and in doing so directly begs the question. For sweet and bitter are on all hands allowed to be denominations of particular distinct sensations: whereas we deny that moral good and evil are at all denominations of sensations, but of dispositions and actions of agents. But it is exactly parallel to the calling the sense of tasting right or wrong.

Now this we certainly may do, and in fact very frequently do, in this and all other senses, internal as well as external. We judge any sense to be wrong, or vitiated, when it represents things otherwise than we knew it would do, if we were in a right state of body. And, even in our best state, our senses often deceive us; and are, or may be, rectified by our reason. A truth so well known to all natural philosophers, that I need not spend time in proving it. In the same manner the moral sense must be esteemed wrong, or vitiated, where it contradicts our reason, in which the health and vigour of the mind consists. If all men were naturally selfish, and ill-natured to others; and by any internal sense found delight in reflecting on actions conformable to such a malign affection; still all men endued with reason, and employing their reason in examining such things, must perceive it to be a wrong

sense that relished such actions; a sense which represented things very differently from what they really were. And it would be as ill reasoning to conclude, from such a vitiated internal sense, the moral goodness or badness of an action, as it would be to conclude the true taste or colour of a body, (that is, what sensation of tasting or seeing would give us in a right habit of body) from the taste or colour which a fever or a jaundice makes it put upon us. But, as in the external senses our reason must be the test to inform us whether they are perfect in their kind, or defective and vitiated; so it is likewise in the internal senses. And without this standard of reason to recur to, all senses would be equally right, merely because they were senses; which we know is contrary to fact.

But I think Philanthropus here gives the point up in effect himself. For he admits that reason may shew men, that their moral sense, as it is now constituted, tends to make the species happy; and that a contrary sense would have been pernicious. Why—if this be allowed, we have the greatest truth we wanted, and the most complex, and difficult to be demonstrated. And one truth more, and that a self-evident one, will afford us a solid bottom, on which the whole structure of morality may safely rest. And that is, 'That it is better that the species should be happy, than that it should not.' This is such an unmoveable truth, that it will bear all the weight we can lay upon it. And, consequently, whatever actions, or dispositions of the mind, are the proper means to this end, (viz. to ob-

✓ 13

tain the happiness of the species,) are in themselves evidently morally good, being agreeable to this self-evident truth, ‘ That it is best that the species should be ‘ happy.’ And, if we find in ourselves affections, or sentiments, leading to this end, we judge them to be right affections, though I would not chuse to stile them morally good. And so, *vice versa.*

But, if it be farther asked, ‘ Why it is best that ‘ the species should be happy?’ I own no reason can be assigned for it; no more than a reason can be assigned, ‘ why the whole is equal to all its parts,’ or, ‘ a part is less than a whole;’ or, ‘ things equal to the ‘ same third, are equal to one another.’ No reason can be ever given for a self-evident axiom: for all reasoning is only an appeal to some self-evident principle or other. And if I could find a man of so different a make of understanding from mine, that what was self-evident to me was not so to him, I should have no medium by which I could argue with him any longer on that head; but we must part, and own that we cannot understand each other: only in that case we should not be angry at one another, for what neither of us could help.

Again, if it be farther demanded, ‘ For whom is ‘ it best, that the species should be happy?’ I answer; For themselves, and for every one who has any thing to do with them, and who is capable of perceiving, ‘ That happiness is better than misery;’ and of seeing this consequence, ‘ That therefore, he does for ‘ the better who promotes happiness any where, than

' he who promotes misery.' And this, I should think, every intelligent being must perceive, if he applies his mind to it at all.

The other objection Philanthropus takes notice that I insinuate is, ' That if there is no moral standard antecedent to a sense, then all constitution of senses had been alike good and reasonable in the Deity : ' I meant, for the Deity to appoint and cause.

To this he answers; ' That we can conceive no exciting reasons of the Divine actions, antecedent to something in the Divine nature, of a nobler kind, corresponding to our kindness and sweetest affections ; by which the Deity desires universal happiness as an end---The justifying reasons of the divine actions must end in our moral sense, which makes us approve such a kind beneficent constitution of our nature.'

But I would here ask Philanthropus, by what kind of reasoning it is, that we attribute benignity to the Deity ? Is it only because we find benign affections in ourselves ? If so ; then, on the same ground, we may attribute pain and uneasiness to him, because we sometimes feel them ; or any other imperfect sentiment, which is familiar to us. But the truth is, we conclude, that the Deity cannot but be benign ; because, by some previous standard in our own minds, we judge benignity to be a perfection ; something in itself right and excellent ; and therefore cannot be wanting where there is infinite perfection. And this brings us back

to the Inquiry; ‘ How, and by what standard, we are to judge of our affections and senses?’ Which was fully considered under the former objection, and needs not be repeated here. So that we go much higher in our inquiry than the bare consideration of affection, or a moral sense in ourselves. I own, indeed, we cannot but conceive something in the Deity, in some measure analogous to our kindest affections; as that he takes infinite pleasure in communicating good to his creatures. But this consideration by itself would only lead us to conclude him infinitely happy, and not good in a moral sense. We esteem him essentially good, because he knows all truth, and always acts according to it. He infallibly knows what is best; and will always do what is best upon the whole, all things considered. For instance, his infinite knowledge represents to him happiness, as something that is better than misery. And thence we firmly conclude, that he will always propose the happiness, and not the misery, of his creatures, as his end in creating them. And, if he creates them with a capacity for happiness; he will not make it impossible for them to be happy: though perhaps it may be in the nature of things impossible to make them capable of the happiness of intelligent and free agents, without leaving it in their own power to make themselves miserable if they will; which will therefore still be best, to put in their own election, tho’ the consequence may be evil to them thro’ their own perverse choice.

And I think here Philanthropus again gives up the cause; when he admits that our reason might have suggested, that, if the Deity did study our happiness as an end, the omitting to give us such a sense, if we could have had an idea of it, was omitting the proper means for obtaining his end.

Then surely there can be no doubt, that the Deity intended us to be happy when he created us: nor can we suppose that he intends us to be happy, and yet with-holds from us the necessary means of happiness. For the not doing the one would be acting contrary to what he knows to be best: and the other would be acting contrary to his own design. Neither of which can find place in an intelligent, free, and perfect being.

So that, upon the whole, I think, these objections have not been answered by Philanthropus. And indeed, they seem to me such as cannot be removed, and must entirely overturn his notions of moral good and evil.

But I cannot part with Philanthropus, till I assure him once more, that I think the treatise of the Original of Virtue, which gave occasion to this debate, as well as the other concerning Beauty and Order, exceedingly ingenious, and well argued from the principles laid down. And if the author had laid his principles deeper, he would have made his discourse as useful and solid, as it is delightful and entertaining. And I should not esteem my labour lost, if by what I

80 CONCERNING THE FOUNDATION OF VIRTUE.

have said, I could provoke him to undertake the proof of the rectitude and excellence, as well as of the existence, of his moral sense. ---I am fully perswaded he would be much more capable of deducing that series of truths, which is necessary to the compassing such a design, than,

Your, &c.

PHILARETUS.

P O S T S C R I P T

Concerning the Meaning, and different Acceptations of the Words GOOD and EVIL.

THERE having been frequent occasion in the foregoing papers, to mention the words Moral Good and Moral Evil, it may not be thought improper to subjoin something here, by way of further Inquiry into the original and strict meaning of the words Good and Evil, and how the derived senses of those words are formed from the original ones; that so we may the more readily attend to the true importance of them, when they are applied to moral subjects.

If this inquiry is pursued, with regard to any one of these words, it will be sufficient; because, they signifying direct opposite ideas, whatever is affirmed of the one is to be denied of the other.

I shall therefore confine myself to the word Good, as the most eligible to describe. And what shall be said of Good, will be easily applicable, by reversing it, to Evil; provided the reader proceed cautiously in applying it.

By Good, when taken in the primary and proper sense of the word, we denote the idea of some perfection or excellence of nature; which commonly goes by the name of physical goodness. When the nature of the thing which we say is good, is absolutely or infinitely perfect, in every sense; then it constitutes abso-

lute or infinite goodness, or goodness in the highest sense, and utmost extent, of the word. When the nature is limited, and consequently not absolutely perfect every way; then, if the thing we speak of be at all good, it constitutes respective goodness, or goodness according to the measure and limits of that nature, supposed always to have some degree of goodness in it. And a thing is said to be more or less good, or its respective goodness to be greater or less, as it is thought to approach nearer to, or to keep a greater distance from, absolute goodness, still supposing it to have some positive goodness: or, by comparing it with some other respectively good thing, and finding the difference of its respective goodness, i. e. the excess or deficiency of it. These operations are both performed by the mind, when it considers one thing as better or worse than, or as good as, another. Whatever, likewise, is the result, or proper consequence of good, is good in this primary sense. And if good is ever the occasion of evil, it is by accident, and from some other extrinsic cause; which will not interfere with the foregoing self-evident proposition.

From this primary and strict sense of good, we deduce a secondary and relative sense. Thus, when the constitution and nature of any thing suits it for a particular end, we say it is good; meaning relatively to that end. And it is called better or worse, in this relative sense, as it answers that end more or less perfectly. In

this sense an eye or ear is said to be good to see or hear with: a house is good to dwell in, &c.

But then, unless the end to be served be a good end in the primary sense of good, the thing which serves that end is not good in that primary sense, tho' it be called good relatively; which word, in that case, means no more than useful or apt for that purpose. Thus meat is not good in the strict sense, tho' it please the taste, if the consequence of eating it be sickness or pain; tho', in the common speech, what pleases the taste is said to be good, i. e. good relatively to the taste.

Another relative sense of good is, when any thing is said to answer one particular relation. And here, that may be relatively good, which is not good in the primary sense: as, an ill man may be a good scholar or workman. And what is relatively good may, at the same time, be relatively bad: as a good father may be a bad friend, or subject, &c. Whereas that which is good in the primary sense can never be bad in the primary sense. Therefore, before relative goodness can coincide with primary goodness, it must be goodness with respect to all the relations in which the thing stands, or universal relative goodness.

A third relative sense of goodness is, when it denotes the aptness of any thing to give us pleasure. We call such a thing good, i. e. relatively good for us. But still a thing may be good for us, in this relative sense; and yet be far from being good in itself. As if

the causing undeserved misery to others; or the committing any crime, should be a source of pleasure to us, or to any other person.

Therefore what causes pleasure, tho' it be always relatively good, is yet never good in the primary sense, unless that pleasure be the result of a good nature, or of acting agreeably to that nature.

When pleasure is the result of perception, intelligence, power, rectitude of nature, inclining us to use our power according to our intelligence, joined with a consciousness of willing and acting so; then pleasure is the result of a good nature, and a good manner of acting; and consequently, that which procures it is good in the primary, as well as in the relative sense of the word.

But where pleasure is the result of perception, and power, with a wrong apprehension of things; or with a right apprehension, and a wrong and perverse nature inclining to will and act contrary to that apprehension; or with a right apprehension, and a rightly disposed nature, and yet at the same time a consciousness of willing and acting in a manner contrary to that intelligence and rectitude of nature: in all these cases, I say, it is evidently the result of an evil nature, or evil manner of acting; and consequently, cannot be good in the primary sense of good, though it is still good relatively, i. e. it is good to us.

Hence, by-the-by, we may collect, that God, who is the author of nothing but what is good in the pri-

mary sense, will never annex pleasure upon the whole to an evil nature, nor to the acting contrary to a good nature; and therefore, that moral goodness must upon the whole be attended with happiness, and moral badness cannot. I speak not of particular incidental pleasures and pains, which limited and imperfect creatures may enjoy or suffer contrary to this rule, for wise reasons, and perhaps for their greater good upon the whole; but of happiness, which is the excess of their whole pleasures above their whole pains.

When the word Good means goodly or beautiful, it is taken in this last relative sense. For by beauty we understand no more, than what occasions pleasure by the contemplation of it. There is no need at present of inquiring into the other metaphorical senses of the word. What has been said will be sufficient to explain the importance of this term Good, when applied to moral subjects.

HAVING thus far enquired into the different acceptations of the word Good; it is easy to deduce from thence the analogy they all bear to the original and primary sense.

The relative goodness, or aptness for an end, is properly enough styled goodness; because it is a degree of perfection and excellence of nature, to answer the end which the nature of the thing suits it for: tho' to render it strictly, and upon the whole, good, the end, must be likewise a good end.

Again, the relative goodness of answering any one relation is, so far as that relation reaches, good in the proper sense : tho' it is but partial goodness, unless all the relations are at the same time answered.

Lastly, The relative goodness of what affords pleasure, is properly termed good in one view, as being the result of something, which, in itself, and considered alone, is good, viz. perception and power : though this pleasure is evil in another view, as it arises from a mixture of evil ingredients, viz. a perverse understanding, a wrong nature, or an incongruous manner of acting ; and as perception and power, in conjunction with those evil properties, are themselves corrupted and rendered evil ; or, rather, the being, who perceives and has power, without right intelligence, and right nature, is an evil being.

FROM all that has been said, it will appear, what is understood by moral goodness.

It is plain, moral goodness means the goodness of a moral person, i. e. of an intelligent agent.

Now, as agency implies freedom, i. e. a power to act, it is evident an agent is a good agent, when he employs this power well ; and employing power well, is the employing it agreeably to a good nature. And the associating the ideas of intelligence, and of a propensity to act according to intelligence, gives us the complex idea of a good nature. It follows, that to employ power, or exert freedom, agreeably to intelligence, and to

the propensity of nature to act according to it, is employing power well, and consequently being a good agent. And, because intelligence is always supposed to be right intelligence, or the intelligence of truth; and further, because it cannot be conceived that an intelligent being should in his nature be propense to act contrary to his intelligence; therefore it is said, that moral goodness consists in acting agreeably to truth.

Moral goodness depends on the power of the agent; since by withdrawing or not exerting that power he ceases to be a good agent, were his intelligence and natural disposition never so good. And, on the other hand, moral goodness supposes a good nature, i. e. intelligence and rectitude of natural disposition; because, without these the agent cannot act well. No one can do what he knows not how to do; nor can be expected to do what he is no ways disposed to do.

If there was no such thing as liberty, or agency, the distinction of moral and physical good would be a mere distinction of words without any difference in the things. If there was no physical good, then moral good would be an impossible idea, having no ground to rest upon. For it would be frivolous to say an agent is good, if we had no idea of good.

When we say, an agent employs his power well, if we mean only, that he employs it so as to produce a good effect; this imports no goodness of agency, but only the physical goodness of the cause and effect: which is the same, whether the cause be supposed to

act in the strict sense of the word, or only to be acted upon, i. e. to be an instrumental cause; which, in strict speech, is no proper cause at all, but only an effect serving as an instrument to work another effect.

But if, when we say an agent employs his power well, we preserve the idea of agency, and speak accurately; we then mean, that the agent intends and desires to produce a good effect, and acts agreeably to that intention and inclination. But he cannot intend it, without intelligence, i. e. without knowing what is a good effect; and will not desire it, unless his nature disposes him to act agreeably to his intelligence. And intelligence, and an inclination to act intelligently, are evidently physically good qualities, or perfections of nature. Consequently, an intelligent nature, disposed to act intelligently, is a good nature in the physical and primary sense. It follows, that an agent, who employs his power well, is an agent who employs his power agreeably to such a good nature. And the idea of such an agent is the idea of a moral good person.

Goodness, when applied to agents, bears the same primary, and relative senses, which it bears when applied to any other subject. The primary sense of moral goodness implies the absolute or respective perfection of agency. The relative senses of moral goodness, imply the perfection of agency, with regard to the relations in which the agent stands.

And moral goodness in the relative sense, must be relative with respect to all the relations in which the

agent stands, before it can coincide with moral goodness in the primary and strict sense of the word.

THERE is a particularly relative sense of good, which, tho' it falls under the foregoing definitions, yet deserves to be considered apart, as being the most common acceptation of the word. It is, when the word is applied with regard to the communication of good from one agent to another.

Goodness in this respect bears sometimes a physical, and sometimes a moral sense.

When it carries a physical sense, it is termed benignity : which is physical goodness, as it is a high perfection of nature. And it appears to be a perfection of nature ; because it is the result of intelligence, which perceives good as good, and evil as evil ; and of a propensity or disposition of nature to act agreeably to that intelligence ; which properties are in themselves perfections of nature. And whatever is the result of a perfection of nature, is a perfection of nature itself. Only it must be observed, that this relative goodness, in order to fall in with primary goodness, must be relative to all, not partial ; not goodness to some, and evil to others ; it must be goodness to the whole. And the general term of goodness is appropriated to benignity, as benignity is one of the noblest and most exalted perfections that can denominate any nature good in the primary sense of the word.

When the word goodness, in this respect of com-

municating good to others, carries a moral sense, it means the acting agreeably to this natural benignity: and is then stiled benevolence; which, when it takes effect, is called beneficence. This benevolence goes by the name of goodness, i. e. moral goodness; because it is the goodness of an agent as such, acting agreeably to a good, which is in this case a benign, nature. And this branch of moral goodness has the general title of goodness, as it bears a moral sense, conferred upon it; because it is justly placed in the foremost rank of moral excellency, and is seldom found to stand alone.

I SHALL only further examine in what sense the word good is applied to the affections of the mind.

The affections are proper to those agents to whom a certain system of matter is annexed; which they direct within certain limits, and which again influences them to a certain degree; not so indeed as to take away their agency, but so as to affect their inclination or desire to act. These influences are sometimes distinguished into appetites, passions, affections; and sometimes go under the general denomination of affections. They are considered as something different from the propensity, which must be conceived in every intelligent agent to act agreeably to his intelligence; and arise from our particular constitution and frame of soul and body. We find by experience that the consciousness of some actions, over and above the immediate uneasiness it gives the mind, creates such a disturbance

and disorder in the material system to which we are joined, as reflects back a further pain and uneasiness to the mind, i. e. to the intelligent agent. And, on the other hand, the consciousness of other actions gives such a kindly motion to the parts of the material system, as returns to the mind a pleasing and grateful sensation.

Now when these affections are said to be good, it is always in the physical, never in the moral sense; because they are not in our power, and do not depend on our choice or will. They are relatively good in this physical sense, as far as they afford us pleasure. But still, if that pleasure be the result of evil, the affections will not be good in the primary and proper sense; though they will be still good to us, as far as they serve to encrease our happiness.

Again, these affections are relatively good with respect to the end they are adapted to. This end is, to deter us from some actions, and to prompt us to others; by encreasing the pleasure or pain of being conscious of such actions.

And the affections are apt and proper instruments to serve this end. But still we cannot determine that these affections are good in the primary sense, till we have examined the end they are subservient to, and have found it to be a good end, in the primary sense of good: that is, till we have by some other test tried whether the actions they prompt us to are in themselves good actions, and those they deter us from are

evil ones. This test is to us the true nature of things, as far as it may be perceived and understood by our intelligence. It follows, that only our intelligence can inform us when these affections are good in the strict and proper sense: and we can never infer it from the sensations which the affections themselves give us; nor, consequently, from any internal or moral sense, which is only the result of those sensations.

I said these affections are peculiar to intelligent agents, united to a system of matter, as their organ and sensorium. For the Supreme Being, who is of an absolutely perfect nature; who sees every instant whatever is every where true; and is by the necessity of his nature always disposed to use his power agreeably to his intelligence, i. e. to act wisely; and who is infinitely happy from the result of those perfections of his nature, and of his consciousness of always acting in conformity to them; stands in need of no such assistance from affections to redouble his happiness, and thereby to augment his disposition to do right, as he has made us to want, and has therefore afforded us. And as he does not stand in need of such assistance, so neither could he possibly receive it; being of a perfectly independent nature; whom therefore nothing from without can influence or act upon.

THOUGHTS ON LAUGHTER.

— *Rapias in jus malis ridentem alienis.* HOR.

TO HIBERNICUS.

THREE is scarce any thing that concerns human nature, which does not deserve to be enquired into: I send you some thoughts upon a very common subject, Laughter; which you may publish, if you think they can be of any use, to help us to understand what so often happens in our own minds, and to know the use for which it is designed in the constitution of our nature.

Aristotle, in his Art of Poetry, has very justly explained the nature of one species of laughter, viz. the ridiculing of persons, the occasion or object of which he tells us, is Ἀμάρτυρα τι γένος αἰχος ἀνωδύνος γένεσις φθαρτικόν; ‘ some mistake, or some turpitude, with-

'out grievous pain, and not very pernicious or destructive.' But this he never intended as a general account of all sorts of laughter.

But Mr. Hobbes, who very much owes his character of a philosopher to his assuming positive solemn airs, which he uses most when he is going to assert some palpable absurdity, or some ill-natured nonsense, assures us, that ' laughter is nothing else but sudden glory, arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly : for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour.'

This notion the authors of the Spectators N° 47, have adopted from Mr. Hobbes. That bold author having carried on his inquiries, in a singular manner, without regard to authorities ; and having fallen into a way of speaking, which was much more intelligible than that of the schoolmen, soon became agreeable to many free wits of his age. His grand view was to deduce all human actions from self-love : by some bad fortune he has over-looked every thing which is generous or kind in mankind ; and represents men in that light in which a thorough knave or coward beholds them, suspecting all friendship, love, or social affection, of hypocrisy or selfish design, or fear.

The learned world has often been told that Puffendorff had strongly imbibed Hobbes's first principles,

although he draws much better consequences from them; and this last author, as he is certainly much preferable to the generality of the schoolmen, in distinct intelligible reasoning, has been made the grand instructor in morals to all who have of late given themselves to that study: hence it is that the old notions of natural affections, and kind instincts, the sensus communis, the decorum, and honestum, are almost banished out of our books of morals; we must never hear of them in any of our lectures for fear of innate ideas: all must be interest, and some selfish view; laughter itself must be a joy from the same spring.

If Mr. Hobbes's notion be just, then first, there can be no laughter on any occasion where we make no comparison of ourselves to others, or of our present state to a worse state, or where we do not observe some superiority of ourselves above some other thing: and again, it must follow, that every sudden appearance of superiority over another, must excite laughter, when we attend to it. If both these conclusions be false, the notion from whence they are drawn must be so too.

1st. Then, that laughter often arises without any imagined superiority of ourselves, may appear from one great fund of pleasantry, the parody, and burlesque allusion; which move laughter in those who may have the highest veneration for the writing alluded to, and also admire the wit of the person who makes the allusion. Thus many a profound admirer of the machinery in Homer and Virgil, has laughed heartily at the

interposition of Pallas in Hudibras, to save the bold Talgol from the Knight's pistol, presented to the outside of his skull :

But Pallas came in shape of rust,
And 'twixt the spring and hammer thrust
Her Gorgon shield, which made the cock
Stand stiff, as 'twere transform'd to stock.

And few who read this, imagine themselves superior either to Homer or Butler ; we indeed generally imagine ourselves superior in sense to the valorous knight, but not in this point, of firing rusty pistols. And pray, would any mortal have laughed, had the poet told, in a simple unadorned manner, that his knight attempted to shoot Talgol, but his pistol was so rusty that it would not give fire ? and yet this would have given us the same ground of sudden glory from our superiority over the doughty knight.

Again, to what do we compare ourselves, or imagine ourselves superior, when we laugh at this fantastical imitation of the poetical imagery, and similitudes of the morning ?

The sun, long since, had in the lap
Of Thetis taken out his nap ;
And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn,
From black to red began to turn.

Many an orthodox Scotch Presbyterian (which sect few accuse of disregard for the holy Scriptures) has been put to it to preserve his gravity, upon hearing the application of Scripture made by his countryman Dr. Pitcairn, as he observ'd a crowd in the streets about a mason, who had fallen along with his scaffold, and was over-whelmed with the ruins of the chimney which he had been building, and which fell immediately after the fall of the poor mason; ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. And yet few imagine themselves superior either to the apostle or the doctor. Their superiority to the poor mason, I’m sure, could never have raised such laughter, for this occur’d to them before the doctor’s consolation; in this case no opinion of superiority could have occasioned the laughter, unless we say, that people imagined themselves superior to the doctor in religion: but an imagined superiority to a doctor in religion, is not a matter so rare as to raise sudden joy; and, with people who value religion, the impiety of another is no matter of laughter.

It is said, * ‘That when men of wit make us laugh, it is by representing some oddness or infirmity in themselves, or others.’ Thus allusions made on trifling occasions, to the most solemn figured speeches of great writers, contain such an obvious impropriety,

* See the Spectator.

that we imagine ourselves incapable of such mistakes as the alluder seemingly falls into; so that in this case too, there is an imagined superiority. But in answer to this, we may observe, that we often laugh at such allusions, when we are conscious that the person who raises the laugh, knows abundantly the justest propriety of speaking, and knows, at present, the oddness and impropriety of his own allusion as well as any in company; nay, laughs at it himself: we often admire his wit in such allusions, and study to imitate him in it, as far as we can. Now, what sudden sense of glory, or joy in our superiority, can arise from observing a quality in another, which we study to imitate, I cannot imagine. I doubt, if men compared themselves with the alluder, whom they study to imitate, they would rather often grow grave or sorrowful.

Nay, farther, this is so far from truth, that imagined superiority moves our laughter, that one would imagine from some instances the very contrary: for if laughter arose from our imagined superiority, then, the more that any object appear'd inferior to us, the greater would be the jest; and the nearer any one came to an equality with us, or resemblance of our actions, the less we should be moved with laughter. But we see, on the contrary, that some ingenuity in dogs and monkeys, which comes near to some of our own arts, very often makes us merry; whereas their duller actions, in which they are much below us, are no matter of jest at all. Whence the author in the Spectator

drew his observation, ‘ That the actions of beasts
‘ which move our laughter, bear a resemblance to a hu-
‘ man blunder,’ I confess I cannot guess; I fear the
very contrary is true, that their imitation of our grave
wise actions would be fittest to raise mirth in the obser-
ver. Exr

The second part of the argument, that opinion of superiority suddenly incited in us does not move laughter, seems the most obvious thing imaginable: if we observe an object in pain while we are at ease, we are in greater danger of weeping than laughing: and yet here is occasion for Hobbes’s sudden joy. It must be a very merry state in which a fine gentleman is, when well dressed, in his coach, he passes our streets, where he will see so many ragged beggars, and porters and chairmen sweating at their labour, on every side of him. It is a great pity that we had not an infirmary or lazar-house to retire to in cloudy weather, to get an afternoon of laughter at these inferior objects: strange, that none of our Hobbists banish all Canary birds and squirrels, and lap-dogs, and puggs, and cats out of their houses, and substitute in their places asses, and owls, and snails, and oysters to be merry upon. From these they might have higher joys of superiority, than from those with whom we now please ourselves. Pride, or an high opinion of ourselves, must be entirely inconsistent with gravity; emptiness must always make men solemn in their behaviour; and conscious virtue and great abilities must always be upon the sneer. An or-

thodox believer who is very sure that he is in the true way to salvation, must always be merry upon heretics, to whom he is so much superior in his own opinion; and no other passion but mirth should arise upon hearing of their heterodoxy. In general, all men of true sense, and reflexion, and integrity, of great capacity for business, and penetration into the tempers and interests of men, must be the merriest little grigs imaginable; Democritus must be the sole leader of all the philosophers; and perpetual laughter must succeed into the place of the long beard,

—To be the grace
Both of our wisdom and our face.

It is pretty strange, that the authors whom we mentioned above, have never distinguish'd between the words Laughter and Ridicule: this last is but one particular species of the former, when we are laughing at the follies of others; and in this species there may be some pretence to alledge that some imagined superiority may occasion it; but then there are innumerable instances of laughter, where no person is ridiculed; nor does he who laughs compare himself to any thing whatsoever. Thus how often do we laugh at some out-of-the-way description of natural objects, to which we never compare our state at all. I fancy few have ever read the City Shower without a strong disposition to laughter; and instead of imagining any superiority,

are very sensible of a turn of wit in the anthon which they despair of imitating : thus what relation to our affairs has that simile in Hudibras,

Instead of trumpet and of drum,
Which makes the warrior's stomach come,
And whets mens valour sharp, like beer
By thunder turn'd to vinegar.

The laughter is not here raised against either valour or martial music, but merely by the wild resemblance of a mean event.

And then farther, even in ridicule itself there must be something else than bare opinion to raise it, as may appear from this, that if any one would relate in the simplest manner these very weaknesses of others, their extravagant passions, their absurd opinions, upon which the man of wit would rally, should we hear the best vouchers of all the facts alledged, we shall not be disposed to laughter by bare narration ; or should one do a real important injury to another, by taking advantage of his weakness, or by some pernicious fraud let us see another's simplicity, this is no matter of laughter : and yet these important cheats do really discover our superiority over the person cheated, more than the trifling impostors of our humourists. The opinion of our superiority may raise a sedate joy in our minds, very different from laughter ; but such a thought seldom arises in our minds in the hurry of a cheerful con-

versation among friends, where there is often an high mutual esteem. But we go to our closets often to spin out some fine conjectures about the principles of our actions, which no mortal is conscious of in himself during the action; thus the same authors above-mentioned tell us, that the desire which we have to see tragical representations is, because of the secret pleasure we find in thinking ourselves secure from such evils; we know from what sect this notion was derived.

Quibus ipse malis liber es, quia cernere suave. Lucr.

This pleasure must indeed be a secret one, so very secret, that many a kind compassionate heart was never conscious of it, but felt itself in a continual state of horror and sorrow; our desiring such sights flows from a kind instinct of nature, a secret bond between us and our fellow-creatures.

*Naturae imperio gemimus cum funus adultae
Virginis occurrit, vel terra clauditur infans.*

—*Quis enim bonus*—
Ulla aliena sibi credit mala.

JUVEN.

TO THE
AUTHOR OF THE DUBLIN JOURNAL.

*Humano capiti cervicem, pictor equinam
Jungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas
Undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
Desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne,
Speculum admissi, Risum teneatis amici?*

HOR.

SIR,

IN my former letter, I attempted to shew that Mr. Hobbes's account of laughter was not just. I shall now endeavour to discover some other ground of that sensation, action, passion, or affection, I know not which of them a philosopher would call it.

The ingenious Mr. Addison, in his treatise of the Pleasures of the Imagination, has justly observ'd many sublimer sensations than those commonly mention'd among philosophers: he observes particularly, that we receive sensations of pleasure from those objects which are great, new, or beautiful, and on the contrary, that objects which are more narrow and confined, or deformed, and irregular, give us disagreeable ideas. It is unquestionable, that we have a great number of perceptions, which one can scarcely reduce to any of the five senses, as they are commonly explained; such as either the ideas of grandeur, dignity, decency, beauty, harmony; or on the other hand, of meanness, baseness, indecency, de-

formity; and that we apply these ideas not only to material objects, but to characters, abilities, actions.

It may be farther observed, that by some strange associations of ideas made in our infancy, we have frequently some of these ideas recurring along with a great many objects, with which they have no other connection than what custom and education, or frequent allusions give them, or at most, some very distant resemblance. The very affections of our minds are ascribed to inanimate objects; and some animals, perfect enough in their own kind, are made constant emblems of some vices or meanness; whereas other kinds are made emblems of the contrary qualities. For instances of these associations, partly from nature, partly from custom, we may take the following ones; sanctity in our churches, magnificence in public buildings, affection between the oak and ivy, the elm and vine; hospitality in a shade, a pleasant sensation of grandeur in the sky, the sea, and mountains, distinct from a bare apprehension or image of their extension; solemnity and horror in shady woods. An ass is the common emblem of stupidity and sloth, a swine of selfish luxury; an eagle of a great genius; a lion of intrepidity; an ant or bee of low industry, and prudent oeconomy. Some inanimate objects have in like manner some accessory ideas of meanness, either for some natural reason, or oftner by mere chance and custom.

Now, the same ingenious author observes, in the Spectator, Vol. I. N^o 62, that what we call a great

genius, such as becomes a heroic poet, gives us pleasure by filling the mind with great conceptions; and therefore they bring most of their similitudes and metaphors from objects of dignity and grandeur, where the resemblance is generally very obvious. This is not usually called wit, but something nobler. What we call grave wit, consists in bringing such resembling ideas together, as one could scarce have imagined had so exact a relation to each other; or when the resemblance is carry'd on thro' many more particulars than we could have at first expected: and this therefore gives the pleasure of surprize. In this serious wit, tho' we are not solicitous about the grandeur of the images, we must still beware of bringing in ideas of baseness or deformity, unless we are studying to represent an object as base and deformed. Now this sort of wit is seldom apt to move laughter, more than heroic poetry.

That then which seems generally the cause of laughter, is 'The bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas, as well as some resemblance in the principal idea: this contrast between ideas of grandeur, dignity, sanctity, perfection, and ideas of meanness, baseness, profanity, seems to be the very spirit of burlesque; and the greatest part of our raillery and jest are founded upon it.'

We also find ourselves moved to laughter by an overstraining of wit, by bringing resemblances from subjects of a quite different kind from the subject to

which they are compared. ‘ When we see, instead of
‘ the easiness, and natural resemblance which consti-
‘ tutes true wit, a forced straining of a likeness, our
‘ laughter is apt to arise; as also, when the only re-
‘ semblance is not in the idea, but in the sound of the
‘ words.’ And this is the matter of laughter in the
pun.

Let us see if this thought may not be confirmed in many instances. If any writing has obtained an high character for grandeur, sanctity, inspiration, or sublimity of thoughts, and boldness of images; the application of any known sentence of such writings to low, vulgar, or base subjects, never fails to divert the audience, and set them a laughing. This fund of laughter the antients had by allusions to Homer: of this the lives of some of the philosophers in Diogenes Laërtius supply abundance of instances. Our late burlesque writers derive a great part of their pleasantry from their introducing, on the most trifling occasions, allusions to some of the bold schemes, or figures, or sentences of the great poets, upon the most solemn subjects. Hudibras and Don Quixote will supply one with instances of this in almost every page. It were to be wished that the boldness of our age had never carry’d their ludicrous allusions to yet more venerable writings. We know that allusions to the phrases of holy writ have obtained to some gentlemen a character of wit, and often furnish’d laughter to their hearers, when their imaginations have been too barren to give any other

entertainment. But I appeal to the religious themselves, if these allusions are not apt to move laughter, unless a more strong affection of the mind, a religious horror at the profanity of such allusions, prevents their allowing themselves the liberty of laughing at them. Now in this affair I fancy any one will acknowledge that an opinion of superiority is not at all the occasion of the laughter.

Again, any little accident to which we have joined the idea of meanness, befalling a person of great gravity, ability, dignity, is a matter of laughter, for the very same reason; thus the strange contortions of the body in a fall, the dirtying of a decent dress, the natural functions which we study to conceal from sight, are matter of laughter, when they occur to observation in persons of whom we have high ideas: nay, the very human form has the ideas of dignity so generally joined with it, that even in ordinary persons such mean accidents are matter of jest; but still the jest is increased by the dignity, gravity, or modesty of the person; which shews that it is this contrast, or opposition of ideas of dignity and meanness, which is the occasion of laughter.

We generally imagine in mankind some degree of wisdom above other animals, and have high ideas of them on this account. If then along with our notions of wisdom in our fellows, there occurs any instance of gross inadvertence, or great mistake; this is a great cause of laughter. Our countrymen are very subject to

little trips of this kind, and furnish often some diversion to their neighbours, not only by mistakes in their speech, but in actions. Yet even this kind of laughter cannot well be said to arise from our sense of superiority. This alone may give a sedate joy, but not be a matter of laughter; since we shall find the same kind of laughter arising in us, where this opinion of superiority does not attend it: for if the most ingenuous person in the world, whom the whole company esteems, should thro' inadvertent hearing, or any other mistake, answer quite from the purpose, the whole audience may laugh heartily, without the least abatement of their good opinion. Thus we know some very ingenuous men have not in the least suffer'd in their characters by an extemporary pun, which raises the laugh very readily; whereas a premeditated pun, which diminishes our opinion of a writer, will seldom raise any laughter.

Again, the more violent passions, as fear, anger, sorrow, compassion, are generally look'd upon as something great and solemn; the beholding of these passions in another, strikes a man with gravity: now if these passions are artfully, or accidentally raised upon a small, or a fictitious occasion, they move the laughter of those who imagine the occasions to be small and contemptible, or who are conscious of the fraud: this is the occasion of the laugh in biting, as they call such deceptions,

According to this scheme, there must necessarily

arise a great diversity in men's sentiments of the ridiculous in actions or characters, according as their ideas of dignity and wisdom are various. A truly wise man, who places the dignity of human nature in good affections and suitable actions, may be apt to laugh at those who employ their most solemn and strong affections about what, to the wise man, appears perhaps very useless or mean. The same solemnity of behaviour and keenness of passion, about a place or ceremony, which ordinary people only employ about the absolute necessities of life, may make them laugh at their betters. When a gentleman of pleasure, who thinks that good fellowship and gallantry are the only valuable enjoyments of life, observes men with great solemnity and earnestness, heaping up money, without using it, or incumbering themselves with purchases and mortgages, which the gay gentleman with his paternal revenues, thinks very silly affairs, he may make himself very merry upon them: and the frugal man, in his turn, makes the same jest of the man of pleasure. The successful gamester, whom no disaster forces to lay aside the trifling ideas of an amusement in his play, may laugh to see the serious looks and passions of the gravest business, arising in the loser, amidst the ideas of a recreation. There is indeed in these last cases an opinion of superiority in the laughter; but this is not the proper occasion of his laughter; otherwise I see not how we should ever meet with a composed countenance anywhere: men have their different relishes

of life, most people prefer their own taste to that of others ; but this moves no laughter, unless in representing the pursuits of others, they do join together some whimsical image of opposite ideas.

In the more polite nations there are certain modes of dress, behaviour, ceremony, generally received by all the better sort, as they are commonly called : to these modes, ideas of decency, grandeur and dignity are generally joined ; hence men are fond of imitating the mode : and if in any polite assembly, a contrary dress, behaviour, or ceremony appear, to which we have joined in our country the contrary ideas of meanness, rusticity, sullenness, a laugh does ordinarily arise, or a disposition to it, in those who have not the thorough good-breeding, or reflection, to restrain themselves, or break through these customary associations.

And hence we may see, that what is counted ridiculous in one age or nation, may not be so in another. We are apt to laugh at Homer, when he compares Ajax unwillingly retreating, to an ass driven out of a corn-field ; or when he compares him to a boar : or Ulysses tossing all night without sleep through anxiety, to a pudding frying on the coals. Those three similes, have got low mean ideas joined to them with us, which it is very probable they had not in Greece in Homer's days ; nay, as to one of them, the boar, it is well known, that in some countries of Europe, where they have wild boars for hunting, even in our times, they have not these low sordid ideas joined to that animal,

which we have in these kingdoms, who never see them but in their dirty sties, or on dunghills. This may teach us how impertinent a great many jests are, which are made upon the style of some other ancient writings, in ages when manners were very different from ours, though perhaps fully as rational, and every way as humane and just.

TO THE

AUTHOR OF THE DUBLIN JOURNAL.

*Ridiculum acri**Fortius et melius magnas plerumque fecat res.*

SIR,

TO treat this subject of laughter gravely, may subject the author to a censure, like to that which Longinus makes upon a prior treatise of the sublime, because wrote in a manner very unsuitable to the subject. But yet it may be worth our pains to consider the effects of laughter, and the ends for which it was implanted in our nature, that thence we may know the proper use of it: which may be done in the following observations.

1st, We may observe, that laughter, like many other dispositions of our mind, is necessarily pleasant to us, when it begins in the natural manner, from some perception in the mind of something ludicrous, and does not take its rise unnaturally from external motions in the body. Every one is conscious that a state of laughter is an easy and agreeable state, that the recurring or suggestion of ludicrous images tends to dispel fretfulness, anxiety, or sorrow, and to reduce the mind to an easy, happy state; as on the other hand, an easy and happy state is that in which we are most lively and

acute in perceiving the ludicrous in objects: any thing that gives us pleasure, puts us also in a fitness for laughter, when something ridiculous occurs; and ridiculous objects occurring to a soured temper, will be apt to recover it to easiness. The implanting then a sense of the ridiculous, in our nature, was giving us an avenue to pleasure, and an easy remedy for discontent and sorrow.

Again, laughter, like other affections, is very contagious; our whole frame is so sociable, that one merry countenance may diffuse cheerfulness to many; nor are they all fools who are apt to laugh before they know the jest, however curiosity in wise men may restrain it, that their attention may be kept awake.

We are disposed by laughter to a good opinion of the person who raises it, if neither ourselves nor our friends are made the butt. Laughter is none of the smallest bonds of common friendships, though it be of less consequence in great heroic friendships.

If an object, action or event be truly great in every respect, it will have no natural relation or resemblance to any thing mean or base; and consequently, no mean idea can be joined to it with any natural resemblance. If we make some forced remote jests upon such subjects, they can never be pleasing to a man of sense and reflection, but raise contempt of the ridiculer, as void of just sense of those things which are truly great. As to any great and truly sublime sentiments, we may perhaps find that, by a playing upon words, they

may be applied to a trifling or mean action, or object; but this application will not diminish our high idea of the great sentiment. He must be of a poor trifling temper who would lose his relish of the grandeur and beauty of that noble sentence of holy writ, mentioned in a former paper, from the doctor's application of it. Virgil Travesty may often come into an ingenious man's head, when he reads the original, and make him uneasy with impertinent interruptions; but will never diminish his admiration of Virgil. Who dislikes that line in Homer, by which Diogenes the Cynic answered a neighbour at an execution, who was inquiring into the cause of the criminal's condemnation? (which had been the counterfeiting of the ancient purple.)

"Ελαβε πορφύρεος θάνατος ύπο μοῖρα κραταγή.

Let any of our wits try their mettle in ridiculing the opinion of a good and wise Mind governing the whole universe; let them try to ridicule integrity and honesty, gratitude, generosity, or the love of one's country, accompanied with wisdom. All their art will never diminish the admiration which we must have for such dispositions, wherever we observe them pure and unmixed with any low views, or any folly in the exercise of them.

When in any object there is a mixture of what is truly great along with something weak or mean, ridicule may, with a weak mind which cannot separate the

the great from the mean, bring the whole into disesteem, or make the whole appear weak or contemptible : but with a person of just discernment and reflection it will have no other effect, but to separate what is great from what is not so.

When any object either good or evil is aggravated and increased by the violence of our passions, or an enthusiastic admiration, or fear, the application of ridicule is the readiest way to bring down our high imaginations to a conformity to the real moment or importance of the affair. Ridicule gives our minds as it were a bend to the contrary side ; so that upon reflection they may be more capable of settling in a just conformity to nature.

Laughter is received in a different manner by the person ridiculed, according as he who uses the ridicule evidences good nature, friendship, and esteem of the person whom he laughs at ; or the contrary.

The enormous crime or grievous calamity of another, is not of itself a subject which can be naturally turned into ridicule : the former raises horror in us, and hatred ; and the latter pity. When laughter arises on such occasions, it is not excited by the guilt or the misery. To observe the contortions of the human body in the air, upon the blowing up of an enemy's ship, may raise laughter in those who do not reflect on the agony and distress of the sufferers ; but the reflecting on this distress could never move laughter of itself. So some fantastic circumstances accompanying a crime

may raise laughter; but a piece of cruel barbarity, or treacherous villainy, of itself must raise very contrary passions. A jest is not ordinary in an impeachment of a criminal, or an invective oration: it rather diminishes than increases the abhorrence in the audience, and may justly raise contempt of the orator for an unnatural affectation of wit. Jesting is still more unnatural in discourses designed to move compassion toward the distressed. A forced unnatural ridicule on either of these occasions, must be apt to raise in the guilty or the miserable hatred against the laugher; since it must be supposed to flow from hatred in him toward the object of his ridicule, or from want of all compassion. The guilty will take laughter to be a triumph over him as contemptible; the miserable will interpret it as hardness of heart, and insensibility of the calamities of another. This is the natural effect of joining to either of these objects, mean ludicrous ideas.

If smaller faults, such as are not inconsistent with a character in the main amiable, be set in a ridiculous light, the guilty are apt to be made sensible of their folly, more than by a bare grave admonition. In many of our faults, occasioned by too great violence of some passion, we get such enthusiastic apprehensions of some objects, as lead us to justify our conduct: the joining of opposite ideas or images, allays this enthusiasm; and, if this be done with good nature, it may be the least offensive, and most effectual reproof.

Ridicule upon the smallest faults, when it does not appear to flow from kindness, is apt to be extremely provoking; since the applying of mean ideas to our conduct, discovers contempt of us in the ridiculer, and that he designs to make us contemptible to others.

Ridicule applied to those qualities or circumstances in one of our companions, which neither he nor the ridiculer thinks dishonourable, is agreeable to every one; the butt himself is as well pleased as any in company.

Ridicule upon any small misfortune or injury, which we have received with sorrow or keen resentment, when it is applied by a third person, with appearance of good nature, is exceeding useful to abate our concern or resentment, and to reconcile us to the person who injured us, if he does not persist in his injury.

From this consideration of the effects of laughter, it may be easy to see for what cause, or end, a sense of the ridiculous was implanted in human nature, and how it ought to be managed.

It is plainly of considerable moment in human society. It is often a great occasion of pleasure, and enlivens our conversation exceedingly, when it is conducted by good nature. It spreads a pleasantry of temper over multitudes at once; and one merry easy mind may by this means diffuse a like disposition over all who are in company. There is nothing of which we are more communicative than of a good jest: and many a man who is incapable of obliging us otherwise, can

oblige us by his mirth, and really insinuate himself into our kind affections, and good wishes.

But this is not all the use of laughter. It is well known, that our passions of every kind lead us into wild enthusiastic apprehensions of their several objects. When any object seems great in comparison of ourselves, our minds are apt to run into a perfect veneration: when an object appears formidable, a weak mind will run into a panic, an unreasonable, impotent horror. Now in both these cases, by our sense of the ridiculous, we are made capable of relief from any pleasant, ingenious well-wisher, by more effectual means, than the most solemn, sedate reasoning. Nothing is so properly applied to the false grandeur, either of good or evil, as ridicule: nothing will sooner prevent our excessive admiration of mixed grandeur, or hinder our being led by that, which is, perhaps, really great in such an object, to imitate also and approve what is really mean.

I question not but the jest of Elijah upon the false deity, whom his countrymen had set up, has been very effectual to rectify their notions of the Divine Nature; as we find that like jests have been very seasonable in other nations. Baal, no doubt, had been represented as a great personage of unconquerable power: but how ridiculous does the image appear, when the prophet sets before them, at once, the poor ideas which must arise from such a limitation of nature as could be represented by their statues, and the high ideas of om-

niscience, and omnipotence, with which the people declared themselves possessed by their invocation. ‘ Cry aloud, either he is talking, or pursuing, or he is on a journey, or he is asleep.’

This engine of ridicule, no doubt, may be abused, and have a bad effect upon a weak mind; but with men of any reflection, there is little fear that it will ever be very pernicious. An attempt of ridicule before such men, upon a subject every way great, is sure to return upon the author of it. One might dare the boldest wit in company with men of sense, to make a jest upon a compleatly great action, or character. Let him try the story of Scipio and his fair captive, upon the taking of Carthagena; or the old story of Pylades and Orestes; I fancies he would sooner appear in a fool’s coat himself, than he could put either of these characters in such a dress. The only danger is in objects of a mixed nature before people of little judgment, who by jests upon the weak side, are sometimes led into neglect, or contempt, of that which is truly valuable in any character, institution, or office. And this may shew us the impertinence, and pernicious tendency of general undistinguished jests upon any character, or office, which has been too much over-rated. But, that ridicule may be abused, does not prove it useless, or unnecessary, more than a like possibility of abuse would prove all our senses, and passions, impertinent, or hurtful. Ridicule, like other edged tools, may do good in a wise man’s hands, though fools may cut their fingers

with it, or be injurious to any unwary by-stander.

The rules to avoid abuse of this kind of ridicule, are, first, ‘either never to attempt ridicule upon what is every way great, whether it be any great being, character, or sentiments:’ or, if our wit must sometimes run into allusions, on low occasions, to the expressions of great sentiments, ‘let it not be in weak company, who have not a just discernment of true grendeuer.’ And, secondly, concerning objects of a mixed nature, partly great, and partly mean, ‘let us never turn the meannels into ridicule, without acknowledging what is truly great, and paying a just veneration to it.’ In this sort of jesting we ought to be cautious of our company.

Discit enim citius, meminitque libentius illud,
Quod quis deridet, quam quod probat et veneratur.

HOR.

Another valuable purpose of ridicule is with relation to smaller vices, which are often more effectually corrected by ridicule, than by grave admonition. Men have been laughed out of faults which a sermon could not reform; nay, there are many little indecencies which are improper to be mentioned in such solemn discourses. Now ridicule with contempt or ill-nature, is indeed always irritating and offensive; but we may, by testifying a just esteem for the good qualities of the person ridiculed, and our concern for his interests, let him see that our ridicule of his weakness flows from

love to him, and then we may hope for a good effect. This then is another necessary rule, ‘that along with our ridicule of smaller faults we should always join evidences of good nature and esteem.’

As to jests upon imperfections, which one cannot amend, I cannot see of what use they can be: men of sense cannot relish such jests; foolish trifling minds may by them be led to despise the truest merit, which is not exempted from the casual misfortunes of our mortal state. If these imperfections occur along with a vicious character, against which people should be alarmed and cautioned, it is below a wise man to raise aversions to bad men from their necessary infirmities, when they have a juster handle from their vicious dispositions.

I shall conclude this essay with the words of Father Malebranche, upon the last subject of laughter, the smaller misfortunes of others. That author amidst all his visions shews sometimes as fine sense as any of his neighbours. B. iv. C. 13.

‘There is nothing more admirably contrived than those natural correspondences observable between the inclinations of mens minds and the motions of their bodies.—All this secret chain-work is a miracle, which can never sufficiently be admired or understood. Upon the sense of some surprising evil, which appears too strong for one to overcome with his own strength, he raises, suppose, a loud cry: this cry forced out by the disposition of our machine, pierces

' the ears of those who are near, and makes them understand it, let them be of what nation or quality so ever: for it is the cry of all nations, and all conditions, as indeed it ought to be. It raises a commotion in their brain,—and makes them run to give succour without so much as knowing it. It soon obliges their will to desire, and their understanding to contrive, provided that it was just and according to the rules of society. For an undiscreet outcry made upon no occasion, or out of an idle fear, produces, in the assistants, indignation or laughter instead of pity.—That indiscreet cry naturally produces aversion, and desire of revenging the affront offered to nature, if he that made it without cause, did it wilfully: but it ought only to produce the passion of derision, mingled with some compassion, without aversion or desire of revenge, if it were a fright, that is a false appearance of a pressing exigency, which caused the clamour. For scoff or ridicule is necessary to reassure and correct the man as fearful; and compassion to succour him as weak. 'Tis impossible to conceive any thing better ordered.'

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

PHILOMIDES.

O B S E R V A T I O N S
ON THE
F A B L E OF THE B E E S.

T O

H I B E R N I C U S.

Nunquam aliud Natura, aliud Sapientia dicit.

J U V.

S I R,

A GREAT part of your readers must have heard of a book entitled, Private Vices public Benefits. I do not intend any answer to that book ; but rather hereafter to shew it to be unanswerable, notwithstanding the zealous attempts of some of the clergy. Yet it is to be hoped that that author's performance will not supersede the labours of others on the same subject, without design of answering what he has wrote.

It is not the interest of every writer to free his words from ambiguity. Private Vices public Benefits, may signify any one of these five distinct propositions : viz. ‘ private vices are themselves public benefits : or, ‘ private vices naturally tend, as the direct and necessary means, to produce public happiness : or, private ‘ vices by dextrous management of governors may be ‘ made to tend to public happiness : or, private vices

'natively and necessarily flow from public happiness :
'or lastly, private vices will probably flow from public
'prosperity through the present corruption of men.'
Were it proper to croud your margin with citations,
you should have several passages of that book for each
of these five sentences, as if it were the meaning of
the title. Far be it therefore from a candid writer to
charge upon him any one of these opinions more than
another ; for if we treat him fairly, and compare the
several parts of his work together, we shall find no
ground for such a charge.

What his own private happiness is, any one may know by reflecting upon the several sorts of pleasant perceptions he is capable of. We imagine our fellows capable of the same, and can in like manner conceive public happiness. They are happy who have what they desire, and are free from what occasions pain. He is in a sure state of happiness, who has a sure prospect that in all parts of his existence he shall have all things which he desires, or at least those which he most earnestly desires, without any considerable pains. He is miserable who is under grievous pain, or who wants what he most violently desires.

There is one old distinction of our desires, according as some of them are preceded naturally by a sense of pain, previously to any opinion of good to be found in the object ; which is desired chiefly in order to remove the pain ; whereas other desires arise only upon a previous opinion of good in the object, either to our-

selves, or to those we love. These desires, though they do not presuppose any sense of pain previous to the opinion, yet may be attended with pain, when the object imagined to be good is uncertain. The former sort of desires are called appetites; the latter affections, or passions. The pains of the appetites when they are not gratified are unavoidable. But the pains of many disappointed passions might have been prevented, by correcting the false opinions, or by breaking foolish associations of ideas, by which we imagine the most momentous good or evil to be in these objects or events, which really are of little or no consequence in themselves.

No reason or instruction will prevent sensible pain, or stop a craving appetite. Men must first be free from violent bodily pain, and have what will remove hunger and thirst, before they can be made happy. This much is absolutely necessary. If there be but small pleasure attending the enjoyment of the bare necessities of life, yet there is violent pain in their absence. Whatever farther pleasures men enjoy, we may count so much positive happiness above necessity.

The world is so well provided for the support of mankind, that scarce any person in good health need be straitened in bare necessaries. But since men are capable of a great diversity of pleasures, they must be supposed to have a great variety of desires, even beyond the necessities of life. The commonest gratifications of the appetites do not satisfy them fully: they desire

those objects, which give some more grateful sensations, as well as allay their pain; they have perceptions of beauty in external objects, and desire something more in dress, houses, furniture, than mere warmth or necessary use. There is no mortal without some love towards others, and desire of the happiness of some other persons as well as his own. Men naturally perceive something amiable in observing the characters, affections and tempers of others, and are struck with a harmony in manners, some species of morality, as well as with a harmony of notes. They are fond of the approbation of each other, and desirous of whatever either directly procures approbation and esteem, or, by a confused association of ideas, is made an evidence of any valuable ability or kind disposition. Wealth and power are in like manner desired, as soon as we observe their usefulness to procure any kind of pleasures.

Since then our desires are so various, and all desire of an object, while it is uncertain, is accompanied with some uneasiness; to make a society happy, it must be necessary, either to gratify all desires, or to suppress, or at least to regulate them. The universal gratification is plainly impossible, and the universal suppressing or rooting them out as vain an attempt. What then remains, in order to public happiness after the necessary supply of all appetites, must be to study, as much as possible, to regulate our desires of every kind, by forming just opinions of the real value of their several ob-

jects, so as to have the strength of our desires proportioned to the real value of them, and their real moment to our happiness. Now all men of reflection, from the age of Socrates to that of Addison, have sufficiently proved that the truest, most constant, and lively pleasure, the happiest enjoyment of life consists in kind affections to our fellow-creatures, gratitude and love to the Deity, submission to his will, and trust in his providence, with a course of suitable actions. This is the true good in our power, which we can never too strongly desire. The pleasures of this kind are so great and durable, and so much above the power of fortune, so much strengthened by the probable hope of every other valuable pleasure of life, especially the esteem and love of our fellows, or at least of the better part of them, that other pleasures seem almost to vanish when separated from them; and even the greatest pains seem supportable if they do not exclude them. By this means we may be sure, if not of all the pleasures we can desire, yet of those which we most desire, and which may make our existence agreeable to ourselves in the absence of others.

This thorough correction of our opinions will not indeed extinguish our appetites, or prevent all pain; but it will keep our appetites unmixed with foreign ideas, so as to be satisfied with the plainest nourishing food, without being disturbed by imaginations of worth, dignity, and merit, in a manner of living which is not in our power. We may in like manner break the foolish conjunction

of moral ideas with the finer sort of habitation, dress, equipage, furniture, so as not to be dejected upon the unavoidable want of such things; we may learn to look upon them as they really are, without imagining them necessary to a happy and honourable life, however they may be some additional advantage to it.

Then we may observe, that though this correcting our opinions and imaginations will make the absence of the pleasures above necessity very tolerable to us, and cut off many vain anxieties, yet no person is thereby rendered insensible of any real pleasure which these objects do give. Though we shall not look upon them as the chief good in life, or preferable to the public interest, to our virtue, or our honour; yet, when they can be enjoyed consistently with superior pleasures, our sense of them may be as acute as that of others. An affectionate temper never stupified the palate; love of a country, a family, or friends, never spoiled a taste for architecture, painting, or sculpture; the knowledge of the true measures and harmony of life, never vitiated an ear, or genius for the harmony of music or poetry. This certainly is the only way in our power of preserving the full relish for all the pleasures of life, and yet securing ourselves against its pains.

But if the fullest present enjoyment cannot make the human mind easy and fully satisfied; if we be disturbed by the uncertainty either of external objects, or of our own existence in this world; if any are subjected to such acute pains, that nothing can make them

amends for them in this life; if no man can be sure but this may be his condition in the future part of his existence in this life; if the present seeming disorders and calamities, sometimes befalling the best of men, and the insolent prosperity of the worst, disturb an honest compassionate heart: the hope of a future state is the only universal support to all conditions of good men, which can make them fully satisfied with their existence at all adventures; especially if the means of obtaining this future happiness are no way opposite to their greatest present happiness.

'Tis too improbable, I own, that all men will ever thus correct their vain opinions and imaginations: but whoever do so in any measure, are so much the happier: and if all did so, all would be as near happiness as our present state will allow. No trade, no manufacture, or ingenious art would be sunk by it, which produces any new pleasures to the senses, imagination, or understanding, without bringing along with it prepolent evil.

It is obvious to all, that in a nation of any tolerable extent of ground, three fourths employed in agriculture will furnish food to the whole. Were this land divided to all, except a few artificers to prepare instruments of husbandry, the whole nation must want all the pleasure arising from other arts, such as fine convenient habitations, beautiful dres, furniture, and handy utensils. There would be no knowledge of arts, no agreeable amusements or diversions; and they must all be

idle one half of their time, since much of the husbandman's time is now spent in providing materials for more curious arts. Would it be adviseable to any impartial mind, who regarded the good of the whole, to keep them in this state, and to prohibit all arts but husbandry, with what was absolutely necessary to it, confining them to their huts, and caves, and beasts skins, to secure them from cold; allowing them no farther compensation for the conveniences they might procure by industry, than the pleasure of idleness for half their lives? What other answer do we need to this question, than what every one will give for himself?

What man, who had only the absolute necessities of meat and drink, and a cave or a beast's skin to cover him, would not, when he had leisure, labour for farther conveniences, or more grateful food? Would not every mortal do so, except some few pretended gentlemen inured to sloth from their infancy, of weak bodies and weaker minds, who imagine the lower employments below their dignity? Does not the universal choice of mankind, in preferring to bear labour for the conveniences and elegancies of life, shew that their pleasures are greater than those of sloth, and that industry, notwithstanding its toils, does really increase the happiness of mankind? Hence it is that in every nation great numbers support themselves by mechanic arts not absolutely necessary; since the husbandman is always ready to purchase their manufactures by the

fruits of his labours, without any constraint; which they would not do if the pleasures or happiness of idleness were greater. This may shew us how little justice there is in imagining an Arcadia, or unactive golden age, would ever suit with the present state of the world, or produce more happiness to men than a vigorous improvement of arts.

The comparative wealth of any country is plainly proportioned to the quantity of the whole produce of husbandry, and other mechanic arts which it can export. Upon the wealth of any country, when other circumstances are equal, does its strength depend, or its power in comparison with others. Now if any alledge that the improvement of arts by foreign trade, is at least pernicious to the public good, by its occasioning many calamities to families, and deaths in shipwrecks; that therefore the whole would have been happier without it; let us only consider, that in computing the good or evil consequences of any actions, we are not only to consider the bare quantities of good or evil, but the probabilities on both sides. Now had a country once as many inhabitants as would consume its natural wild product in their caves or thickets, 'tis plain that according to the usual increase of mankind in peace, the next generation could not subsist without labour, and vigorous agriculture. 'Tis certain also that many diseases and deaths are occasioned by the labours of husbandry: is it therefore for the public good that a thousand should barely subsist as Hottentots without

labour, rather than the double number by agriculture, though a small number should die by that means? When our minds are dejected with old age, or sudden apprehensions of death or its consequences, we may prefer a few days or hours to all things else: but what man of good understanding, in sound health, would not prefer a life of sixty and seventy years with good accommodation, and a numerous offspring, to eighty or ninety years as a Hottentot or worse? What man of common sense would refuse to cross the Channel for a considerable advantage to his family, though they had the bare necessaries? And yet even this voyage hazards life more than staying at home. If the agriculture of three fourths can support the whole, the other fourth, by applying themselves wholly to mechanic arts, will produce more conveniences or pleasures than could be hoped from a fourth of the labours of each man; since by confining their thoughts to a particular subject, the artificers acquire greater knowledge and dexterity in their work. Again, if navigation and foreign trade will support more men than domestic industry and barter, it may really tend to the good of the whole, though it endangers many lives. Five millions subsisting in any country by help of foreign trade, is a greater advantage in the whole than four millions without trade, though in each age twenty thousand should perish by shipwrecks. The rates of insurance will teach us that the losses at sea are not even in this proportion to the number supported by trade, many of

whom go not abroad at all, and others escape when the goods are lost. Either then the propagation of mankind must be diminished, or men must endure even the hazardous labours of the sea. But how few are there in the world who would not, even without any constraint, hazard a voyage rather than die childless : nay, rather than want any conveniences and pleasures of life above necessity for themselves or families ? The increase therefore of trade does plainly tend to the good of the whole, notwithstanding all its hazards, which we see men voluntarily submit to every day.

Now if any own that the increase of trade promotes the present happiness of human life in the whole, and yet maintain that it is vicious ; the debate will turn upon the idea of vice. It is certain that almost all the heathen moralists agreed with him who spake as never man spake, that virtue consists in love, gratitude, and submission to the Deity, and in kind affections towards our fellows, and study of their greatest good. All sects, except the Epicureans, owned that kind affections were natural to men ; and that consulting the greatest public good of the whole, as it was the surest way for each individual to be happy, so it was ‘ *vita secundum naturam, or secundum rectam rationem.* ’ The Epicureans of the better sort, however they denied any affection distinct from self-love, yet taught the same way to private happiness, by reasons like to those used by Puffendorff, only without consideration of the providence of the Deity, or a future

state. If vice be the opposite to virtue, viz. those affections or actions which tend to the public detriment, or evidence ingratitude or contumacy towards the Deity, we may easily conclude that the utmost improvement of arts, manufactures, or trade, is so far from being necessarily vicious, that it must rather argue good and virtuous dispositions; since it is certain that men of the best and most generous tempers would desire it for the public good.

But this subject will require farther consideration.

am,

SIR,

Yours, &c.

P. M.

T O

H I B E R N I C U S.

*Cui non conveniet sua res, ut calceus olim,
Si pede major erit, subvertet; si minor, uret.*

HOR.

S I R,

THE only arguments brought to prove that vice tends to the public happiness of society in this world, are these, ‘That the power and grandeur of any nation depends much upon the numbers of people and their industry, which cannot be procured unless there be consumption of manufactures: now the intemperance, luxury, and pride of men consume manufactures, and promote industry.’ In like manner it is asserted, ‘That in fact all wealthy and powerful states abound with these vices, and that their industry is owing to them.’

But if it can be made appear that there may be an equal consumption of manufactures without these vices, and the evils which flow from them; that wealth and power do not naturally tend to vice, or necessarily produce it; then, though we allow that these vices do consume manufactures and encourage industry in the present corruption of manners, and that these vices often attend wealth and power, yet it will be unjust to conclude, either that ‘vices naturally tend to pu-

' blic prosperity, or are necessary to it; or that pu-
' blic happiness does necessarily occasion them.'

Intemperance is that use of meat and drink which is pernicious to the health and vigour of any person in the discharge of the offices of life. Luxury is the using more curious and expensive habitation, dress, table, equipage, than the person's wealth will bear, so as to discharge his duty to his family, his friends, his country, or the indigent. Pride is having an opinion of our own virtues, abilities, or perfection of any kind, in comparison of others, as greater than what they really are; arrogating to ourselves either obedience, service, or external marks of honour, to which we have no right; and with this view desiring to equal those of higher stations in our whole manner of living. There is no sort of food, architecture, dress, or furniture, the use of which can be called evil of itself. Intemperance and luxury are plainly terms relative to the bodily constitution, and wealth of the person. Pride, as it affects our expences, is also relative to the station and fortune of the person; so that it is impossible to fix one inviolable quantity of food, one fixed sum in expences, the surpassing of which should be called intemperance, luxury, or pride. Every one's own knowledge, and experience of his constitution and fortune, will suggest to him what is suitable to his own circumstances. It is ridiculous to say, ' That using any thing above the bare necessities of life is intemperance, pride, or luxury; ' and that no other universal boundaries can be fixed;

' because what in one station or fortune is bare study
' of decency, or conveniency, would be extravagance
' in another.' As if temperance, frugality, or moderation,
denoted fixed weights or measures or sums, which
all were to observe, and not a proportion to men's cir-
cumstances. Great and little are relative to a species
or kind. Those dimensions are great in a deer which
are small in a horse: what is great in a house
would be small in a mountain. Will any one thence
argue, that there can be no adapting one form to ano-
ther, so that it shall neither be too big nor little? Can-
not a coat suit a middle stature, because the same di-
mensions would be too great for a dwarf, and too little
for a giant? If then in each constitution, station, or
degree of wealth, a man of good sense may know how
far he may go in eating and drinking, or any other ex-
pences, without impairing his health or fortune, or
hindering any offices of religion or humanity, he has
found the bounds of temperance, frugality, and mode-
ration for himself; and any other who keeps the same
proportion, is equally temperate, though he eats and
drinks, or spends more than the other.

That these are the ideas of temperance, frugality,
and moderation, given by all moralists antient and mo-
dern, except a few Cynics of old, and some Popish
hermits, is plain to all who read them. All sects, as
wells as Stoicks, recommended the correction of our o-
pinions and imaginations about the pleasures above ne-
cessity; and yet the use of them they all allow, when

it is not inconsistent with the offices of life: in such circumstances they were always looked upon as preferable to their contraries. The Christian law suggests nothing contrary to this; it has set before us, beside the present pleasures of virtue, which it represents as superior to all others, the hopes of eternal happiness; yet it frequently recommends diligence and industry in providing for ourselves and families, and for a fund of good offices toward others: it nowhere condemns the rich or powerful for being so, or for desiring high stations, unless when these desires are so violent as to counteract our duty. The requiring some to part with their possessions, was only a candid forewarning of the first disciples, what their profession of Christianity would probably cost them in those days of persecution. A community of goods is nowhere commanded; though men who knew the approaching persecution did wisely sell their possessions, to turn them to the only valuable purpose then in their power, and conveyed them to persons who could possess them.

Since then intemperance, or pride, were scarce ever understood to denote all use of any thing above bare necessities, all conveniency of life above Hottentots; why any one should affect to change their meaning, is not easily guessed, unless it be with this view. Luxury, intemperance, and pride, in their common meaning, are vices; but in this new meaning are often innocent, nay virtuous; and without them, in this new sense, there can be no consumption of manufactures.

Common readers however will still imagine that these sounds denote vices; and finding that what they confusely imagine is vicious, is necessary to public good, they will lose their aversion to moral evil in general, and imagine it well compensated by some of its advantages.

But let us retain the common meaning of these words. 'Tis certain, luxury, intemperance, and pride, tend to consume manufactures; but the luxurious, intemperate, or proud, are not a whit the less odious, or free from inhumanity and barbarity, in the neglect of families, friends, the indigent, or their country, since their whole intention is a poor selfish pleasure. The good arising to the public is no way owing to them, but to the industrious, who must supply all customers, and cannot examine whether their expences are proportioned to their fortunes or not. To illustrate this by an instance in the manner of that notable writer: ' Suppose his Decio, or Alcander, or Jack, surfeited with beef, falls into some light distemper, and in hopes of attendance at low rates, sends for a neighbouring quack: the quack imagines no danger, but makes the patient believe it; he talks much in the usual cant of bilious temperaments and sanguine complexions, of the sinking of spirits, and the heart's feeling cold and condensed, and heavy as lead, of mists and confusion about his eyes; he promises, after some previous preparations, which the quack find necessary to prolong the disorder, by some powerful medicines, to swell his spirits, restore them to their strength, &c.

' elasticity, and due contexture, that they may fan the arterial blood again, and make him so light that he may tread upon air. The patient grows worse, fears death, thinks on his past life, and sends for an honest parson, who instructs him in true principles of virtue, and shews him wherein he has been deficient: the strength of his constitution overcomes both the drugs and the disease, the patient recovers, becomes a man of integrity and religion, and ever after honours the honest clergy as the most useful men in any state.' Now are these effects to be ascribed to the quacks? Are such pretenders the less odious? Is quackery the cause of religion or virtue, or necessary to it? Does the honour of the clergy depend upon the practice of quacks? 'Tis best in such affairs to go no farther than confused apothegms: 'Private quackery, public virtue: Medicinal nonsense, patients repentence: Quacks prescriptions, honours to the clergy.'

But let us in the next place examine if an equal consumption of manufactures, and encouragement of trade, may be without these vices. Any given number in a small time, will certainly consume more wine by being drunkards, than by being sober men; will consume more manufactures by being luxurious or proud (if their pride turn upon expences) than by being frugal and moderate. But it may be justly questioned, whether that same number would not have consumed more in their whole lives, by being temperate

THE FABLE OF THE BEES. 141

and frugal : since all allow that they would probably live longer, and with better health and digestion ; and temperance makes a country populous, were it only by prolonging life.

Again, would there not be the same consumption of the same products, if inferior people contracted their drinking and dress within the bounds of temperance and frugality, and allow'd poor wives and children what might be necessary to exhilarate and strengthen them for labour, and to defend them from the cold, or make their lives easier ? Would there be a less consumption, if those of greater wealth kept themselves within the bounds of temperance ; and reserved the money thus saved to supply the interest of money lent gratis to a friend, who may be thereby enabled, consistently with temperance, to drink as much wine, as, had it been added to the quantity drunk by the lender, would have taken away his senses ? Or, if all men drink too much, and families too ; what if they retrenched ? The money sav'd might improve their dress, habitation, or studies ; or might enable a poorer friend to consume the same, or other manufactures, with equal advantage to the public ; or might preserve the same persons longer in life, and health, and good circumstances, so as in their whole lives to consume more.

In general, if the single luxury of the master of a family consumes manufactures, might not an equal quantity be consumed by retrenching his own expen-

ces, and allowing conveniences to his family? If a whole family be luxurious in dress, furniture, equipage; suppose this retrenched, the increase of wealth to the family may soon enable younger children in their families to consume among them frugally, as much as would have been consumed luxuriously by the ancestor; or the frugal consumption of fifty years, in the condition of a wise gentleman, may be as great, as the luxurious consumption of twenty years, succeeded by thirty years of pinching, remorse or beggary. If a man of wealth has no children, his own moderate enjoyment, with what he may enable worthy friends to consume in their own houses, or what he may spend temperately at a hospitable table, and genteel equipage, may amount to as much as the squandering of a luxurious Epicure, or vain fool, upon his own person, in the short time his life or fortune will last.

Unless therefore all mankind are fully provided not only with all necessaries, but all innocent conveniences and pleasures of life, it is still possible, without any vice, by an honest care of families, relations, or some worthy persons in distress, to make the greatest consumption. Two or three plain suits becoming gentlemen, worn by younger brothers or friends, will employ as many hands as a foppish one worn by a vain heir. The same may be said of furniture of houses, equipage, or table. If there be sufficient wealth to furnish the most sumptuous dress, habitation, equipage, and table to the proprietor, and discharge all offices of hu-

manity, after a proportionable rate, why should this be called vice? It plainly tends to public good, and injures no man. 'Tis indeed the business of a wise man to look before him, and to be armed against those hazards or accidents which may reduce the highest fortunes: all men should correct their imaginations, and avoid any habit of body or mind, which might be pernicious upon a change of fortune, or unfit them for any duty of life: but this may be done without reducing men to a Cynical tub, or frize coats. Wherein then the virtue of this retrenchment should consist, or the vice of a more pleasant chearful way of life, is not easy to tell; unless it lies in the confused use of ambiguous words, temperance, and frugality, and humility.

Who needs be surprized that luxury or pride are made necessary to the public good, when even theft and robbery are supposed by the same author to be subservient to it, by employing locksmiths? Not to repeat again, that all the good effect is plainly owing to the industrious, and not to the robber; were there no occasion for locks, had all children and servants discretion enough never to go into chambers unseasonably, this would make no diminution of manufactures; the money saved to the house-keeper would afford either better dres, or other conveniences to a family, which would equally support artificers: even smiths themselves might have equal employment. Unless all men be already so well provided with all sorts of convenient utensils, or furniture, that nothing can be added,

a necessity or constant usefulness of robbers can never be pretended, any more than the public advantages of shipwrecks and fires, which are not a little admired by the author of the Fable.

'Tis probable indeed we shall never see a wealthy state without vice. But what then? 'Tis not impossible: and the less any nation has of it, so much the happier it is. Wise governors will force some public good out of vices if they cannot prevent them: and yet much greater public good would have flowed from opposite virtues. The excise is now increased by the drunkenness of some poor masters of families: but sharing their drink with their poor families might make equal consumption of the same kind; or if they retrenched this article, they might consume other kinds of goods, paying equal duty to the public. The persons themselves would avoid many diseases, be more capable of labour, live longer, in all probability, in contentment and good temper, without foolish contention, quarrels, and dissatisfaction both in their families and among their neighbours. The like would be the effect of a sober and temperate deportment in better stations.

As to the question of fact in this matter: perhaps whoever looks into all the ranks of men, will find it is but a small part of our consumptions which is owing to our vices. If we find too splendid dress at court, or at * Lucas's, or at public meetings for diversion; we

* *The gayest coffee-house in Dublin.*

shall find plain dresses at the exchange, at the custom-house, at churches. The expensive gaiety continues but a few years of most peoples lives, during their amours, or expectation of preferment: nor would a good-natur'd man call this gaiety always vicious. Our gentlemen in the country seldom suffer in their fortunes by their dress. The consumption in tables would not be much diminished, though men would never run into surfeiting and drunkenness: 'tis not one in a hundred who is frequently guilty of these vices, and yet all are every day consuming. The extraordinary consumption of revels occasions generally abstinence for some time following; so that in a sober week as much may be consumed as in the week one has had a debauch. Did we examine our own manufactures, either linen or woollen, we should find that coarse cloths and stuff, the wearing of which none count extravagant, employ ten times as many hands as the fine. And of the fine cloths which are bought, not one of the buyers in ten can be called extravagant. Were even this extravagance removed, the consumption of the same persons during their lives might be as great, as by the vanity of a few years with the poverty of the remainder.

Thus we may see with how little reason vices are either counted necessary, or actually subservient to the public happiness, even in our present corruption.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.

P. M.

K

T O
H I B E R N I C U S.

*Cujus velut aegri somnia, vanae
Finguntur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni
Reddatur formae*

HOR.

SIR,

MR. Addison in his fourth Whig Examiner has given an excellent description of a certain way of writing which is absolutely unanswerable; and he has pointed out the secret strength by which it is made so. That the Fable of the Bees is a performance of this kind, may be easily shewn, not by general encomiums, but by pointing out its particular excellencies.

There is one outwork of this sort of authors, which, tho' it be not their main strength, yet is often of great consequence to terrify the timorous reader, or adversary; I mean open vanity, and pretences to the deepest knowledge.—‘ Hic murus abeneus esto.’

How formidable must that writer be, who lets us know * ‘ he has observed so much above the short-sighted vulgar, and has given himself leisure to gaze upon the prospect of concatenated events, and seen good spring and pullulate from evil as naturally’ (so

* Page 89.

condescending is he to the meanest of his readers) ‘as chickens do from eggs? How does he raise admiration in the first paragraph of his preface, letting us know that he has seen the ‘chief organs and nicest springs of our machine,’ which are yet but ‘trifling films, and little pipes, not such gross strong things as nerves, bone, or skin?’ Nay, he has no doubt seen ‘* the very strength, elasticity, and due contexture of spirits which constitute the fear of shame, and anger, or courage;’ and also all the other qualities of spirits which constitute the other passions: these passions ‘along with skin, flesh, and bone, make the compound man.’ But this is not all his knowledge; he has † ‘anatomized the invisible part, has seen the gentle strokes, and slight touches of the passions.’

This author can ‡ ‘swagger about fortitude and poverty as well as Seneca, and shew the way to Summum bonum as easily as his way home. || He has searched thro’ every degree of life; and foresees opposition only from those who have lost public spirit, and are narrow-souled, incapable of thinking of things of uncommon extent, which are noble and sublime. He cries ** Apage Vulgus to every opposer, and § writes only for the few who think abstractly, and are elevated above the vulgar.’

* Page 234. † Page 153, and page 77.

‡ Page 162. || Page 163, and pages 366, 367.

** Page 232. § See the Journal subjoined to the Fable.

He tells us, ‘ he has pleased men of unquestionable sense; will always live, and be esteemed while such read him.’

Who will not stand in awe of that author, ‘ who * describes the nature and symptoms of human passions; detects their force and disguises; and traces self-love in its darkest recess beyond any other system of Ethics?’ Who, after all this, and much more, and egotisms, and affectations in every page, needs be told by the author that his vanity he could never conquer?

Another useful secret of invincible authors is to intersperse a contempt of pedantry and of the clergy. These damned pedants have got a trick of reading many authors, observing the sentiments of the greatest men in all ages; and acquire an impudent facility of discerning nonsense in the writings of your easy genteel authors, who are above perplexing themselves with the sourness and intricacies of thought. Without some defiance and contempt of pedants and clergy, readers would never have so much as dreamed that some of our authors were witty and easy writers. When this point is obtained, then we may fall upon our readers like thunder, with all the little learning we are masters of, in season and out of season: about Greek and Roman religions, Egyptian worship of onions (tho' long ago laughed at by a pedantic clergyman in a bro-

* Page 467, 472.

ther-easy-writer on Freethinking) trophies, monuments, arches, military crowns, Alexander, Lorenzo Gratian, Hydaspes, ostracisms; the Laconic spirit of our nation appearing in the word Gin: that fiery lake, the Lethe, the Stygian and Circean cup, from whence pullulate leucophlegmacies: we may talk of Stoicks, Epicureans, Seneca's estate; nay, even cite Ovid, and transpose a passage in Juvenal: *Si licet exemplis*; make double entendres upon the word *enervate*; *Trabat sua quemque voluptas*: a Latin joke from Erasmus: nay may make most philosophico-philological digressions about the essences of hop, inkerns, ice, and oak; we may launch out into those profound depths in Optics, that air is not the object of sight; that bulk diminishes by distance, is owing to our imperfection; that the sky might appear thro' a hole in a wall as near as the stones; talk of Pythagoras's abstaining from flesh, Aesop's making beasts to speak; Ira furor brevis est; Lucretia killed herself for fear of shame. We may improve our langvage by that easy phrase, Meliorating our condition. We may use that most grammatical epithet Superlative; talk of Vannini, Bruno and Effen-di as martyrs (though some of the facts have been disproved long ago) that Homer's heroes talk as porters; Lycurgus's laws; Epaminondas, Leotychidas, Agis, the Polemarchi; Saturnine tempers, Adoration of the manes of the British Aesculapius; Cicero's vanity, he wrote O Fortunatam, &c. My friend Horace: with many other most pert evidences of immense tritical

150 OBSERVATIONS ON

erudition; which no mortal could have known, without having spent several years at a Latin school, and reading Plutarch's lives englisch'd by several hands.

When thus the character of erudition is secured, next comes knowledge of the world, another essential quality of an easy writer. This may be displayed by a word or two of French, tho' we have English words exactly of the same meaning; by talking in the strain of porters and bawds, about their affairs. Then the polite gentleman of fine genius will soon appear by a great deal of poetical language, mixed with prose. What pity it had not all been in rhyme, like the Fable itself? The author's Slaughter-house and Gin-shop would have been as renowned as the cave of the Cyclops, or the dwelling of Circe: *Ingenium par materiae!*

These are but additional helps. The main strength of the impregnable writer consists in intricate contradictions, and inconsistencies; with some manifest absurdities boldly asserted, against which no man can produce an argument, any more than to prove that twice three are not ten. Thus his first sentence is, that ' All
‘ untaught animals desire only to please themselves, and
‘ follow the bent of their inclination, without regard
‘ to the good or harm of others:' But a * few pages after we shall find that gratitude is natural, or that men ' must wish well to benefactors: that pity or a-
‘ version to the misery of others is a natural passion;

* Page 34, and page 68, and 140.

THE FABLE OF THE BEES. 151

' that affection to offspring, and desire of their happiness, is natural : that men may wish well to any other in what they themselves cannot obtain.'

His very definition of vice is ' † Gratifying appetite without regard to the public :' By [without regard] we may charitably understand him to have intended pernicious to the public ; unless he can shew that all men have agreed to call eating when one is hungry, or going to sleep when one is weary, vicious, whenever he does not think of a community. Vice then here is ' doing detriment to the public by gratifying appetite. But go on, and you will find the whole strain of the book to be, that ' vices are useful to the public, and necessary to its happiness: the solid comforts and happiness of life are the gratifications of appetite.'

His definition of virtue is * ' Endeavouring the benefit of others contrary to the impulse of nature.' Yet thro' the whole book universal virtue would be detrimental to society ; that is, all mens endeavouring to benefit others would be detrimental to all : ' ‡ The moral virtues are the offspring of flattery begot upon pride ;' yet in the very same page, and many other places, ' No passion more natural or universal than pride.' Virtue then, which was before contrary to the impulse of nature, now is become following the strongest impulse of nature.

Again, § ' Virtue is the conquest of passion out of

† Page 34. * Ibid. ‡ Page 37. § Page 34.

' the rational ambition of being good ;' but a few pages after this, ' Doing worthy actions from love of goodness has certain signs of pride, (which is the strongest passion) :' And yet, says the author, ' This is a sublimer notion of virtue than his own.'

* ' Heathen religion could not influence men to virtue,' says he : The direct contrary is asserted by all the heathen philosophers, historians, orators, tragedians and comedians. The wiser men saw the folly of their theological fables, but never denied a governing mind : the vulgar might believe the fables of Jupiter and his brothers ; but imagining in the gods a right superior to that of men, they might fear the judgment of the gods for like facts to those done by Jupiter, and expect rewards for obedience to laws given to men, which yet did not bind superior natures. This notion may make it probable that even very corrupt religions may have in the whole much more good effects than evil. But who will regard the testimonies of poor heathens, against this ' observer of concatenated events ?'

Presently we find † ' the seeds of all virtue in the two passions of pride and shame, which are most natural.' In another place, ' virtue was contrary to the impulse of nature, and the conquest of the passions ;' and soon after it will become what it was again, ‡ ' no virtue in what is designed to gratify pride ; the only

* Page 36. † Page 56. ‡ Page 68, and page 246.

' recompence of virtue is the pleasure of doing good ;' but even this pleasure of doing ' good, or acting from ' love of goodness, was pride.'*

Page 59. He begins his anatomizing of passions ; ' the passions concealed from modesty or good manners, ' are pride, lust, and selfishness.' Either then pride and lust is not selfish, but disinterested ; or this division amounts to these three members, to wit, ' one sort ' of selfishness, another sort of selfishness, and selfish- ' ness in general.'

He asserts, that † ' ambassadors debates about pre- cedency flow from pride concealed under shew of vir- tue,' that is, of ' conquering the passions from the ambition of being good.' It seems they all naturally desire to be hindmost, but affect precedence, that they may seem to conquer this passion.

‡ ' Gratitude is a natural motive of inclination, and ' not virtue : returns of good offices are not from gra- titude but from virtue, that is, opposition to the im- pulse of nature ; or manners, that is, concealment ' of pride, lust, and selfishness, in order to gratify ' them.'

|| ' Luxury is the use of any thing above necessity ; ' nor can any other bounds be fixed :' and yet a few pages after, ' all men ought to dress suitably to condi- tion.'

* Page 43. † Page 73. ‡ Page 76.

|| Page 108, and 132.

* ‘Envy is a mixture of sorrow and anger. Sorrow arises from our want of what we desire, and anger is raised by us for our ease.’ (A pleasing passion surely!) ‘Anger is the passion arising when our desire is crossed.’ Thus envy amounts to sorrow for want of what we desire, compounded with the passion arising when desire is crossed.’ This composition is as artful as that of a merry fellow’s punch, who liked to have it made of two quarts of brandy, and one quart of brandy; ‘Si licet exemplis.’

† ‘Self-love bids us look on every satisfied being as a rival;’ and ‘yet nothing can excite any being to oppose another but his being unsatisfied.’

‡ ‘Laughing at another’s fall, is either from envy or malice.’

§ ‘Love signifies affection, that is, liking or wishing well.’ The object’s interest becomes our own in this wonderful manner. ‘Self-love makes us believe that the sufferings we feel must lessen those of our friend; and then a secret pleasure arises from our grieving, because we imagine we are relieving him.’ How strangely does our self-love govern us! It first forms an opinion so prodigiously secret that never any mortal believed it; and then makes us feel pleasure, not in relieving ourselves, but another. Nay, what is it that self-love cannot perform? ** ‘When a man stands in

* Pages 140, and 221. † Page 145. ‡ Page 146. § Page 149. ** Page 55.

' the street, and shrieks at another's fall from a high window or scaffold, he believes that he himself is flying thro' the air : when a man blushes, upon seeing another do a base action, he believes he is doing it himself.'

I have got yet no farther than the 150th page, but with many omissions : you may have when you please twice as many, rather greater beauties of the same nature ; but these may suffice at present. Only I cannot pass over two passages more ; the one is a wonderful composition, so dearly does he love making a very dispensatory of passions, that rather than want composition, he will take two pieces of the same thing for want of different materials : * ' laziness is an aversion to busines, generally attended with a desire of being unactive.' The other passage is a most important maxim ; ' that man never exerts himself but when he is roused by desire ;' or never exerts himself but when he desires something or other. And he subjoins this sublime simile, of ' a huge windmill without a breath of air.'

Before any one pretends to answer this book, he must know what the author means by ' good opinion, high value, worth, unworthiness, merit, noble actions, overvaluing, thinking well, or having a right to do any thing.' But upon these terms, all mortals may despair of it.

* *Page 267.*

We may make one general observation on the dexterity of this author in confuting opposite schemes. Suppose the scheme of almost all moralists, except Epicureans, to be true; ‘that we have in our nature kind affections in different degrees, that we have a moral sense determining us to approve them whenever they are observed, and all actions which flow from them; that we are naturally bound together by the desire of esteem from each other, and by compassion; and that withal we have self-love or desire of private good.’ What would be the consequence of this constitution, or the appearances in human nature? All men would call those actions virtuous, which they imagine do tend to the public good: where men differ in opinions of the natural tendencies of actions, they must differ in approbation or condemnation: they will find pleasure in contemplating or reflecting on their own kind affections and actions: they will delight in the society of the kind, good-natured, and beneficent: they will be uneasy upon seeing or even hearing of the misery of others, and be delighted with the happiness of any persons beloved: men will have regard to private good as well as public; and when other circumstances are equal, will prefer what tends most to private advantage. Now these are the direct and necessary consequences of this supposition: and yet this penetrating swaggerer, who surpasses all writers of Ethics, makes those very appearances proofs against the hypothesis. No proofs will please him but the

contrary appearances: if he saw ' men approving what is pernicious to the public; or men agreeing to approve the same action, though one thought it useful to the public, and another thought it pernicious; or if men had no manner of pleasure in good actions, or in reflecting upon them, nor would value themselves more for heroism than villany; then indeed he would acknowledge a moral sense independent of interest and true virtue.'

So also, ' Men must delight in the company of the proud, morose, revengeful and quarrelsome; they must be indifferent in beholding the most cruel tortures, or the greatest joy and happiness of our fellows, or even of our offspring. Men must do mischief to themselves, or neglect their most innocent pleasures, and interest, by a thorough self-denial, without any inclination to the good of others; and must have no more pleasure in gratitude, generosity, or humanity, than in malice and revenge; otherwise this author will never believe any other affection than self-love: at present he sees all to be but disguises of it, from his deep reflections about fresh herrings, and the company he would choose.'

He has probably been struck with some old fanatic sermon upon self-denial in his youth, and can never get it out of his head since. 'Tis absolutely impossible upon his scheme, that God himself can make a being naturally disposed to virtue: for virtue is self-denial, and acting against the impulse of nature. What else

then can we imagine concerning all the works of God
in their best state, but

—That they were intended,

For nothing else but to be mended?

HUD.

Might we poor vulgar make conjectures concerning the
spirits of nations, we would be apt to conclude, that
thro' incapacity for abstract thinking, the Boeotic spirit
of the British is much better discovered by a fourth e-
dition of this book, than the Laconic by the word
Gin.

Thus may thine enemies triumph, O Virtue and
Christianity !

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

P. M.

L 90103386

B C L